

Freedom and Equality Now!
Contextualizing the Nexus between the Civil Rights Movement and Drama

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Abstract

During the second half of the twentieth century, the concepts of racial exclusion and inequality were impugned when the Civil Rights Movement¹ undertook the challenge to bring about social and racial egalitarianism. The success of the Movement depended on contributions from many sources. This study focuses on the cultural entity of theatre to examine the contributions of selected plays to the Movement. It investigates key theatre-related issues that framed the ethnopolitical debate between white supremacists, Black Nationalists, and racial integrationists to show how the Movement gained from those groups. The thematic premise supports the clause that theatre, as a didactic instrument for change, championed prime Civil Rights Movement goals (public education, housing, and voting) while ascertaining how these goals were integrated in plays to help audiences internalize the political and social ideologies of the Movement. When the Movement brought about an increase in black voting, progress in school desegregation, and enhanced housing opportunities for African Americans, the profound changes ushered in a significant shift in sensibilities, attitudes, and outlooks, which had political ramifications around the world. Thus theatre played a progressive role in the amelioration of race problems through its dramatists. This study argues that this was the era when artists, particularly black theatre artists, fought for equality in American theatre, which resulted in the increased visibility of African-American performers, a proliferation of black theatre productions, a major rise in African-American dramatists, and most important, an explosion in black plays. African-American playwrights, using their dramatic voices to become cultural arbiters and myth-makers while

¹ For the purpose of this project, the Civil Rights Movement covers the period from 1955 through 1970.

simultaneously voicing their advocacy of the Civil Rights Movement's principles, set forth to elucidate and sanction the politics that characterized black grievances. As the Movement was a catalyst for cultural authenticity and literary legitimacy, this study evaluates how a blending of social, political, economic, and cultural factors was dramatized to educate audiences and motivate demonstrators. Methodological approaches consist of critical textual analyses of the plays, evaluations of critical writings on theatre-related civil rights issues, historical analyses of important events of the Movement, and interviews. Primary source materials from the archives of civil rights organizations will reveal how they assisted in promoting, supporting, and marketing these plays. Five notable plays, each endowed with a progressive politics, comprise the primary plays in this study. The introduction provides a historical overview of the Movement and its major goals, focusing on public education, housing, and voting. Chapter One examines Loftin Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River* (1957) and its connection to education. Chapter Two examines Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) to investigate the drama's advocacy for decent housing. Chapter Three relies on Ossie Davis's *Purlie Victorious* (1961) to reveal the role of humor and its connection to civil rights. Chapter Four examines Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* (1964) to investigate black militancy. Chapter Five, which takes on the issue of voting, offers critical analyses of George Sklar's *And People All Around* (1966), which was inspired by real-life events. This study demonstrates how the achievements of theatre, through its texts, played a role in the cultural politics of the Civil Rights Movement.

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Introduction

Most historians would concur that the American Civil Rights Movement was the most significant force for social change in the United States in the twentieth century. The Movement, marked by peaceful protests as well as by riots and violence, radically transformed American political, social, economic, and cultural life. Prior to the Movement, for the most part, blacks were politically and economically oppressed. Through both legal and de facto segregation, blacks were largely prohibited from active participation in the political process and generally excluded from much of mainstream American society. That social order, which survived on the fear and intimidation that engulfed the lives of blacks, functioned under the harsh reality of deep-seated racial prejudice and hatred. The successes of the Civil Rights Movement opened economic, social, and political doors for blacks while simultaneously serving as a catalyst to spawn social protest in the days to come. Pervasive racial justice and equality were embedded principles in the Movement, encompassing equal opportunity in education, employment, housing, and the right to vote, equal access to public facilities, and the promotion of equality and racial justice for all Americans. Known for helping to overturn segregationist Jim Crow laws, the Movement fully supported the rights of citizenship guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. It incorporated strategies, principles, and tactics (sit-ins, marches, etc.) that fundamentally altered the relations between whites and blacks. During this period of major transformation, the term “Negro” became outdated, even offensive, and was replaced by “Afro American” and ultimately, “black.”

The purpose here is to provide neither a time frame² nor a definition for the movement labeled as the “most important social movement in the United States.”³ Nor will this dissertation

² I agree with Aldon Morris, who stated, “Any attempt to date a social movement is risky.” [Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1984), 1] While many scholars will argue that the Civil Rights Movement began in the 1950s with *Brown v. Board of Education*, the murder of Emmett Till, or the Montgomery bus boycott, other scholars argue that the Civil Rights Movement began in the early 1940s or after World War II. [Take a look at: Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Opportunities Found and Lost: Lost Radicals, and the Early Civil

retell the history of pivotal political struggles of that era. The primary purpose is to explore how culture legitimized the political concerns of the Civil Rights Movement, and specifically how theatre was a central tool for that process. Although the social and political characteristics of the Movement have been examined sufficiently, the cultural aspects (particularly the theatre) have been largely overlooked by scholars. In situating the role of the theatre in the Movement, the aim is to emphasize the significance of art as an aspect of social and political change.

Sociologist Larry Isaac argued that movements are cultural production agents:

“Regardless of whatever else they accomplish, they produce new cultural forms in the course of the struggle; they often change and augment mainstream cultural stock in the process, and sometimes live on for generations in collective memory.”⁴

Historian Joe Street explained how civil rights organizations relied on culture as a weapon to broaden the struggle and legitimize their political appeal during the 1960s. Framing his premise, Street argued:

Movement participants frequently used these cultural forms to broaden both the parameters of the movement and the movement’s appeal to ordinary Americans. Movement activists engaged with and used these cultural productions at a local level, where white hegemony was most easily challenged. At this level, participants and observers were encouraged to develop an individual, personal relationship with the movement and to espy the close links between cultural forms and political action.⁵

Similar to the black church⁶ and the new media,⁷ theatre played more than a marginal role in the success achieved by the Movement.

Rights Movement,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 786-811.] It could easily be argued that the Civil Rights Movement began in March 1827 with *Freedom Journal*, the country’s first black newspaper that advocated the full rights of blacks. Despite the urge to argue for a date for the Civil Rights Movement, I am not establishing a date for it; however, the period I am dealing with is 1955 to 1970.

³ Philip G. Altbach, “‘Black Power’ and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 1, no. 6 (Sept. 24, 1966): 233.

⁴ Larry Isaac, “Movement of Movements: Culture Moves in the Long Civil Rights Struggle,” *Social Forces* 87, no. 1 (2008): 36.

⁵ Joe Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2007), 7.

⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

Considering all the cultural forms, the argument here is that theatre is the most dynamic and effective art form. Composer Richard Rodgers even suggested that within theatre, musicals were the most effective form. He claimed:

It must be obvious to all that in its striving toward maturity, the musical theatre has been greatly influenced by the theme of the Negro's unjust and unequal treatment. ...What the musical can do probably more effectively than any other medium is to use the weapons of satire to get its point across. It can explode myths with a line in a song or in a dance routine, or by the use of fantasy. It can frequently be more effective than a drama because the sharpness of its point is cloaked in the trappings of pretty girls, attractive scenery, and light, catchy music. ...Like any dramatic art, the musical is directly affected by the world around it. ...Today, the musical theatre takes its subject matter from almost any concerns, and can be treated in a variety of ways on the situation of contemporary interest.⁸

Theatre is a powerful medium and a tremendous cultural force that gave voice to marginalized segments of society in the 1950s and 1960s while offering an alternative paradigm. Political scientist Harrell R. Rodgers maintains, "The Civil Rights Movement ostensibly sought to bring black Americans into the mainstream of American life."⁹ In the process, it brought more black artists into the mainstream, particularly in theatre.

Of course, this was not the first flourishing of black artists. The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s witnessed an explosion in the arts. James Hatch argued that this was the period when blacks first defined themselves.¹⁰ David Krasner has noted that for blacks this was the period

⁷ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

⁸ Richard Rodgers, "Negro Theme Lined Many a Top Musical," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 9, 1966, 18. By way of examples he noted, "The issue of slavery in the Civil War was an important theme of *Bloomer Girl*. *Finian's Rainbow* used the device of fantasy to point up the nonsensical belief in racial superiority. *Lost in the Stars* was an eloquent expression for the need of brotherhood. Recently on Broadway there were at least two musicals--*Golden Boy* and *The Roar of the Grease-paint--the Smell of the Crowd*--that deal specifically with Negroes and the conditions under which many of them live."

⁹ Harrell R. Rodgers Jr., "Civil Rights and the Myth of Popular Sovereignty," *Journal of Black Studies* 12, no. 1 (September 1981): 53.

¹⁰ Cary D. Wintz, *Lost Plays of the Harlem Renaissance 1920-1940*, eds. James V. Hatch and Leo Hamalian (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 10.

when the “creative outpouring far surpassed any previous era.”¹¹ He contextualized the theatre by asserting: “The Harlem Renaissance was a watershed in American cultural history, and drama and performance were at the forefront of it.”¹² The significance of theatre notwithstanding, at that time many black intellectuals thought the increasing presence and influence of black artists would also usher in a new era of civil rights.¹³ But it did not; one of the major differences between the Civil Rights Movement and the Harlem Renaissance, as argued by some scholars, is that the Movement was considered successful but the Harlem Renaissance a failure. Eloise Johnson highlights the views of two important black scholars on the Harlem Renaissance, arguing that:

Nathan Huggins and Harold Cruse believed that the Harlem Renaissance failed. Huggins attributed the failure to the intelligentsia’s lack of cooperation with the masses. Cruse saw it as a failure in the sense that Harlem intelligentsia failed to have political clout in order to make radical changes.¹⁴

Despite the fact that the Harlem Renaissance was not a political movement like the Civil Rights Movement and the disillusionment with its supposed lack of success, black dramatists began to contribute considerably to American literature during that period. The *Encyclopedia of African American History* counts “more than 130 published plays by Harlem Renaissance authors.”¹⁵ Willis Richardson, Randolph Edmonds, and Eulalie Spence were some of those who responded to the tenor of the times.¹⁶ Richardson’s *A Chip Woman’s Fortune* (1923) was the first black nonmusical drama on Broadway. Garland Anderson followed him on Broadway in 1925 with

¹¹ David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³ David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 89.

¹⁴ Eloise E. Johnson, *Rediscovering Harlem Renaissance: The Politics of Exclusion* (New York: Garland, 1996), 71.

¹⁵ Leslie M. Alexander and Walter C. Rucker, eds., *Encyclopedia of African American History*, Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC (2010).

¹⁶ For more on black dramatists during the Harlem Renaissance, see Freda L. Scott, “Black Drama and the Harlem Renaissance,” *Theatre Journal* 37 (1985): 426-439; or Jeanne-Marie A. Miller, “Georgia Douglass Johnson and May Miller: Forgotten Playwrights of the New Negro Renaissance,” *CLA Journal* 33 (1990): 349-66.

Appearances. *Shuffle Along*, lyrics and music by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, was the first successful black musical on Broadway (1921).

The era was also vital for black women playwrights.¹⁷ In fact, as Will Harris explains, black women playwrights during the Harlem Renaissance

carried on a dual liberation motif with their plays. While dramatizing the plight of their race, as a means of both raising a black racial consciousness and appealing to a possible white audience, early black women playwrights also formulated dramatic strategies which enabled them to stage substantive, independent African American female presences and thus propose their sexuality.¹⁸

Among the notable women playwrights of the period were Angelina Weld Grimké, Marita Bonner, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Mary Burill, Zora Neale Hurston, Ruth Gaines-Shelton, Myrtle Smith Livingston, and Eulalie Spence. And black playwrights were not alone when dramatizing black subjects; white dramatists [including Eugene O'Neill, Ridgely Torrence,¹⁹ Paul Green, Marc Connelly, Dubose and Dorothy Heyward] also tackled black subjects.

To the extent that the Harlem Renaissance was historically the vantage-point decade to have been black—it is often argued that “Negroes” were in vogue back in the 1920s—plays by black dramatists were dismissed after the end of the era. Thus, it had to be a difficult life to exist as a black dramatist. It did not get any better during the 1930s, '40s, or the '50s. At the end of the 1950s, black dramatists were declared to be in a “heartbreaking, frustrating situation.”²⁰ Yet by the end of the 1960s, it was exactly the opposite. It was not only assumed the discernable

¹⁷ Nellie McKay, “What Were They Saying? Black Women Playwrights of the Harlem Renaissance,” in *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined: A Revised and Expanded Edition*, eds. Victor A. Kramer and Robert A. Russ (Troy, NY: Whitson, 1997), 151-166.

¹⁸ Will Harris, “Early Black Women Playwrights and the Dual Liberation Motif,” *African American Review* 28, no. 2 (1994): 205.

¹⁹ Ridgely Torrence, who grew up with and spent time with blacks, presented his plays *Granny Maumee*, *The Rider of Dreams*, and *Simon the Cyrenian*, at the Garden Theatre in Manhattan on April 17, 1917--this was at the beginning of WWI. The plays were praised for their serious portrayals of blacks. Torrence was respected and appreciated by blacks for his effort, unlike that of many white playwrights' minstrel-show depictions of blacks.

²⁰ Harry Granick, “Frustrating Situation,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1959, X3.

increase in black playwrights afforded them the opportunity to “flex their muscles and feel their power,”²¹ but also that “more theater is going on in black communities than ever before—on college campuses, in church groups, benevolent organizations, in Y.M.C.A.s and in youth and community groups.”²² The burgeoning phenomenon, which captured the public imagination and placed a premium on the black experience, did not limit itself to black playwrights; white playwrights (from Jean Genet to Martin Duberman to Howard Sackler to George Sklar) tackled black-related issues and subjects. One thing is certain: during that period, those playwrights concerned themselves with the *problems of their age*.

Examining the Civil Rights Movement, historians and scholars have focused extensively on the contributions of the black church and its music to reveal how America was jarred out of its traditional ways, illuminating how it was made possible for progressive politics to facilitate a significant shift in sensibilities that would be more in accord with the ideal of democracy.²³ The Civil Rights Movement was indeed church-based; black churches have been viewed for a very long period as a place of stability and power in the black community. Because of that broad-based scholarly examination of the black church’s contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, contributions of the theatre have been overshadowed and thus diminished. Nonetheless, civil rights leaders and organizations relied on theatre for support.

As in the black church, a reciprocal exchange between actors and audience members existed in the theatre; civil rights leaders understood that and relied on theatre to be an instrument of empowerment for blacks. While most of the theatre discussed in this dissertation used the conventions and structures of mainstream theatre, the Civil Rights Movement employed, for the

²¹ Clive Barnes, “Stage: The Upsurge of Black Theater,” *New York Times*, January 19, 1969, 61.

²² Lewis Funke, “Negro Stage: It’s Happening,” *New York Times*, November 24, 1967, 45.

²³ Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free Press, 1986), 4.

most part, a type of theatre that was similar to the theatre that emerged in America during the 1930s--a theatre that promoted activism and generated commitment and participation from audience members. For example, "The role of theatre in SNCC's [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] 1964 Mississippi Summer Project ... is termed cultural organizing. Here theatre was employed to reinforce the project's political message, to unite audience members behind that message--and that of the wider civil rights movement."²⁴

Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement not only relied on theatre for its creative and even financial support, as will be shown in this study, they relied on theatre for an invigorated activism that it sparked. In essence, theatre facilitated collective action during the Civil Rights Movement. The Free Southern Theater, founded in 1963, is a prime example; John O'Neal, one of its founders, often pronounced the Theater's objectives:

1. To persuade society to include the Negro in its public conscience.
2. To stimulate creative thinking limited by segregated schools.
3. To remedy the lack of cultural opportunities.²⁵

Those objectives were prevalent in the artistic environment of the time. O'Neal, who was a field director for SNCC, specifically placed the theatre in the South. Thus, the cultural and educational aspects of Free Southern Theater were designed to connect to poor rural communities in the South. It quickly established itself as the model for politically active theatre in the South. The Theater established a reputation for its adaptations of well-known plays. Regardless of whether the Theater was doing a production of *Waiting for Godot* in whiteface, or adding a new section on the murders of civil rights martyrs Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman to Martin Duberman's *In White America*, it was understood by its audience that the purpose was to interconnect the plays with the politics of the Civil Rights

²⁴ Street, *The Culture War in the Civil Rights Movement*, 8.

²⁵ Louise P. Dumetz, "Meet John O'Neal, Cause Rebel," *Chicago Defender*, July 17, 1965, 26A

Movement. O'Neal and Free Southern Theater were not alone connecting their art to the Civil Rights Movement; artists of every kind contributed in some way to the Civil Rights Movement. If not through the Artists Civil Rights Assistance Fund, a nonprofit foundation that provided money for civil rights causes,²⁶ they gave of their time, talent, and activism. While activism was a significant part of the political strategy during the Civil Rights Movement, there was also pressure on artists to become involved. Ingrid Monson states, "As the Civil Rights Movement became a dominating presence in the public consciousness, however, particularly after the year-long Montgomery bus boycott (1955-56), the African-American community increasingly expected black musicians, entertainers and celebrities to do their part in the struggle."²⁷ It was a time when art was married to politics; politics became the crucible of self-expression. Activism was identified with a sense of moral urgency; artists, particularly black artists, had to become decisive participants because the struggle, challenge, and issues related specifically to them. Black artists called attention to important issues, and activism on their behalf was expected. But artistic activism did not necessarily mean overt political advocacy. As writer Ralph Ellison explained:

I think the Negro artist operates most effectively in relation to his group by being a good artist. If he is being a good artist to the extent that he is writing about the reality he knows best--which, to a large extent, will be the reality of Negro life--he will anticipate some of the developments which will come later.

He goes on to elaborate:

The Negro artist's obligation is to discover something about himself and the nature of Negro life to others...and he doesn't get any credit from me when he moves away from it. It is not the function of the artist to help the civil-rights movement directly. His task is to discover what reality is, what values are, and this can be very helpful to those functions in the civil-rights movement.

²⁶ "Artists Support Rights," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 30, 1965, 16.

²⁷ Ingrid Monson, "Monk Meets SNCC," *Black Music Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 188.

...For my part, I belong to certain organizations, contribute money, and support people who can do something directly. ...I don't think it makes any more sense for a Negro writer to stop his work in order to be responsible to his group than for Jim Brown of the Cleveland Browns to stop playing football and become a civil-rights agitator.²⁸

For Ellison, the black artist who finds artistic truth would inevitably connect to the goals and objectives of the Civil Rights Movement.

Literary critic Granville Hicks observed, "Surveying the whole of literary history [American literature], one can scarcely think of a writer, commonly recognized as great, who did not immerse himself in the life of the times, who did not concern himself with the problems of his age."²⁹ While the objective of this project is not to assert the greatness of the selected playwrights, the five writers examined here made a conscious commitment to confront issues related to racism at that explosive moment in history when a wholesale reevaluation of race relations was occurring in the United States. The selected dramatists contextualized cultural paradigms within the dynamics of their plays, thus opening the way for social issues and political and ideological formations to enter the mainstream of American discourse.

This dissertation examines the contributions of five plays while exploring the importance of the playwrights' affiliations with civil rights organizations and civil rights leaders. Chapter One focuses on Loftin Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River*, which deals with school segregation. In 1942, only 40 percent of whites in the North and 2 percent of whites in the South thought white and black students should go to the same school.³⁰ On May 17, 1954, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed racial segregation in public schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*) in a unanimous decision (9 to 0). *Brown v. Board of Education* was indeed a

²⁸ Nobuo Abiko, "Negro Artist," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 6, 1964, 9.

²⁹ Granville Hicks, *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), 301.

³⁰ James Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.

momentous case that legalized equal education as a right to be accorded all citizens. Mitchell dramatized the story of Joseph DeLaine, a South Carolina pastor and schoolteacher whose historic battle against school segregation became the major desegregation case in Clarendon County, South Carolina, *Briggs v. Elliott*. *Briggs v. Elliott* became the major case among the five that comprised *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Chapter Two looks at Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, which now ranks among the canonical plays in the American theatre repertoire. The play dramatizes the problem of fair housing. The battle over housing discrimination/housing integration was one of the most intense struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Housing was the central commodity that allowed private prejudice to dictate the residential confines of neighborhoods. This chapter contextualizes the housing battle while exploring why the drama is the exemplary Civil Rights Movement play. Integration, interracialism, and the savvy politics of moderation made this drama acceptable to both whites and blacks.

Though the serious issues of the Civil Rights Movement were treated with equal seriousness by most playwrights, humor could also be a potent weapon. Humor can intrude on every conceivable aspect of reality and thus break barriers. The Civil Rights Movement gave voice to the black comic. Stepin Fetchit and the stereotypes of blacks were no longer accepted--a new humor invaded the period. Comedian Godfrey Cambridge explained how the Movement affected his comedy:

The back-of-the-bus jokes are out. Now for instance, my routine deals with my trip to Europe, that I've made it, whatever change, whatever humor you've brought out of it, that's it. So that primarily what is happening is that we're unfolding new experiences as we're allowed to participate in society.³¹

³¹ Jerry Buck, "Negro Comics not just 'Black,'" *Sun*, December 29, 1968, 61.

Chapter Three focuses on humor during the Civil Rights Movement era and how it conveyed political meaning while facilitating mutual understanding between groups with opposing ideas. The experience of laughing together advanced an understanding between the races. Ossie Davis understood that function. In *Purlie Victorious*, he used politically charged satire to mock segregation while bringing whites and blacks together. In an interview that Davis gave three months before his death, he professed that by learning how to laugh together, whites and blacks would progress to solving racial problems together.³²

By the early 1960s, a rising black militancy questioned the goals and strategies of integration. Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* rejected humor, integration, and nonviolence, three key components of the Civil Rights Movement. The Movement also witnessed the birth of a new form of black radicalism--a radicalism that falls under the heading of black power--incorporating the more militant faction of civil rights organizers. Baraka used politically charged radicalism to advocate an unconventional political position, one that was not in step with major civil rights organizations. Chapter Four examines *Dutchman* to investigate the role of militancy in the Civil Rights Movement. Baraka dramatized the relations between a young black student and a seductive white woman to explore the ramifications of race and an emerging radical politics.

Finally, Chapter Five offers a critical analysis of white dramatist George Sklar's *And People All Around* and its theme of the battle to register black citizens to vote. The play was inspired by a real event, the deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. The issue of voting was the chief preoccupation in Mississippi and Sklar dramatized it to reveal that change was inevitable.

In addition to the textual analyses of the plays and extensive archival research, oral history narratives served as an essential tool in the gathering of information for this dissertation. Thirty

³² Ossie Davis, interview with author (November 23, 2004).

interviews with writers, actors, politicians, and others were conducted for this project. The interviewees' perspectives helped provide a broader cultural, political, and personal context to the Civil Rights Movement. Those individuals gave invaluable appraisals of the plays and discussed their importance to the Movement. Additionally, the interviewees also provided a sense of the day-to-day social reality of their struggles: theatre participants connected actual theatre experiences and theatre-related histories to the Civil Rights Movement. Most valuable, the interviews show a direct connection between theatre's transformative impact and the Civil Rights Movement.

Dramas of the Civil Rights Movement, as instruments for social reform, educated the public about vital issues of the Movement; they were used for fundraising events; they motivated demonstrators; and they advocated integration. In the advocacy for racial justice, the dramas alerted audiences to those major Civil Rights Movement issues, as well as playing a role in the awakening of the moral consciousness of Americans.

Michael Kirby argued, "Art does change the way people think, and new ways of thinking may eventually cause changes in laws and government."³³ The theatre and drama of the Civil Rights Movement attempted to "change the way people think," but they also attempted to bring about "changes in laws."

The panoramic scope of this study attempts to present an overview of the twentieth-century American Civil Rights Movement and its connection to theatre to reveal how American dramatists incorporated political, social, and economic issues into the fabric of their plays to change the racial climate of a contested political period. Relying on a wide variety of sources, this study situates cultural, political, and social problems in the historical frame of the Civil Rights Movement. American dramatists did more than create worthwhile dramatic

³³ Michael Kirby, "On Political Theatre," in "Political Theatre Issue," *Drama Review: TDR* 19, no. 2 (June 1975): 131.

entertainment; they played a fundamental role in voicing problems, illuminating issues, and assisting in the transformation of society during the Civil Rights Movement era.

Chapter One:

Loften Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River*

Loften Mitchell's play, *A Land Beyond the River*, opened on March 28, 1957, at the Greenwich Mews Theatre in New York City. The play not only politicized the struggle of equal education, it also illuminated the racialized polarization of blacks in America while illustrating the transformative role theatre played in the Civil Rights Movement. This chapter explores the nexus between this seminal drama and the Civil Rights Movement.

At that central moment when the Movement was gaining in significance, and addressing vital social and political issues, the Greenwich Mews Theatre produced Mitchell's play, which dramatized the most important civil rights issue of its time, education. The theatre was unique for its era. William Branch, whose plays were produced by the theatre and who attended many of its productions, states that the Greenwich Mews Theatre "deserves acknowledgement as a major contribution to black theatre at a time when black playwrights found little encouragement in other circles."³⁴

The Greenwich Mews Theatre, located in a 280-seat church basement on West Thirteenth Street, was "established in 1950 under the sponsorship of the Village Presbyterian Church and the Brotherhood Synagogue."³⁵ Stella Holt, the blind producing director hired by the theatre as its director in 1952, was one of the first to use integrated casts.³⁶ The theatre maintained a permanent interracial company of more than 100 writers, directors, and actors. It was the cultural outlet for both the church and the synagogue and had developed a loyal audience.³⁷ By the mid-1960s, Holt and Frances Drucker (her companion) had produced thirty-four plays, eight of them written by black playwrights.³⁸

³⁴ William Branch, "Loften Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River* (1957)" (Presented at the National Conference on Black American Protest Drama and Theatre, Morgan State University, April 18-19, 1985, 2).

³⁵ Louis Calta, "Union Will Assist Greenwich Mews," *New York Times*, March 27, 1958, 40.

³⁶ "Stella Holt Dies, Blind Producer," *New York Times*, August 29, 1967, 37.

³⁷ Calta, "Union Will Assist Greenwich Mews," 40.

³⁸ James V. Hatch and Errol G. Hill, *A History of African American Theatre* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 365.

The political, cultural, and religious dynamism of Mitchell's play, ranging from the advocacy of meaningful social change to spiritual guidance, was compatible with the Greenwich Mews Theatre and with civil rights organizations. Mitchell had packed the play with pertinent themes that were agreeable to their politics. Three significant themes permeated *A Land Beyond the River* and accounted equally for its success: education, integration, and nonviolence.

By the time *A Land Beyond the River* received its original production, Mitchell (1919-2001) had already had several plays produced in Harlem.³⁹ *A Land Beyond the River* brought him wider recognition that enabled him to go on to become an author and educator; he taught for many years at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Mitchell, who had studied playwriting with John Gassner at Columbia University,⁴⁰ became a prolific playwright. His most successful venture in the theatre was the Broadway musical *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, for which he received a Tony Award nomination for the book. *Sugar* was given a Tony for the Best Musical in 1976. Many of Mitchell's plays depict the heroic acts of African Americans, celebrating their contributions to black communities and their impact on American society.

A Land Beyond the River is Mitchell's dramatization of the story of Joseph DeLaine, a South Carolina schoolteacher and preacher whose historic case played a crucial role in the Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*. In December 1952, the U.S. Supreme Court had on its docket cases from Kansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia, all of which challenged the constitutionality of racial segregation in public schools. The Court consolidated these five cases under one name, *Oliver Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of*

³⁹ Early plays by Mitchell: *Shattered Dreams* (1938), produced the year after his graduation from DeWitt Clinton High School with honors; *Blood in the Night* (1946); *The Bancroft Dynasty* (1948); and *The Cellar* (1952).

⁴⁰ James V. Hatch and Errol G. Hill, *A History of African American Theatre*, 366. [The registrar at Columbia confirmed that Mitchell took a Dramatic Arts course at Columbia during the summers of 1946 and 1947 but could not confirm that Gassner taught the course.]

Topeka; these collective cases became the *Brown* case.⁴¹ Brown, of course, is now the name that is remembered, the one in the history books, while the names of the others have been essentially forgotten. One courageous individual was the Reverend Joseph A. DeLaine, whose suit ended up in *Brown* as *Briggs v. Elliott*. Although each case in the *Brown* decision has its own story of a heroic individual, DeLaine's story provided the substance for Loften Mitchell's play.

The Joseph DeLaine Saga: A Story Worth Dramatizing

Joseph A. DeLaine (1898-1974) was born in the town of Manning in Clarendon County, South Carolina. He was one of fourteen children fathered by a strict clergyman in the African Methodist Episcopal church. Clarendon County had not changed much in a half century; 1950 looked a lot like 1900. The population was approximately 32,000. Seven out of every ten people were African Americans. The overwhelming majority of people in the area lived and worked on farms. African Americans worked on farms in three ways: they rented the land for an annual fee, contracted the farm, or sharecropped the farm. While whites owned eighty-five percent of the land in the region, the DeLaine family was prosperous; it owned 250 acres of farmland.⁴²

During the 1950s, thirty-five percent of all African Americans in the area over the age of ten were illiterate.⁴³ A telling detail in the white school/black school disparity: white schools had flush toilets while black schools had outhouses.⁴⁴ Richard Kluger offers an indictment on the sad state of affairs in Clarendon County, stating that near the mid-twentieth century it was "nothing short of economic slavery, an unbreakable cycle of poverty and ignorance breeding more poverty

⁴¹ *Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka et al.* (Kansas); *Briggs et al. v. Elliott et al.* (South Carolina); *Davis et al. v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia, et al.* (Virginia); *Bolling et al. v. Sharpe et al.* (District of Columbia); and *Belton et al. v. Gebhart et al.*; *Bulah et al. v. Gebhart et al.* (Delaware).

⁴² Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Random House, 1977), 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁴ James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25.

and a bit less ignorance.”⁴⁵ The public officials of Clarendon County (the chief of police, the sheriff, and the county superintendent of education) publicly acknowledged membership in the White Citizens Council.⁴⁶

In a region where education for African Americans was systematically discouraged, DeLaine survived enormous challenges to get an education. At fourteen, he made a life-changing decision. A white boy pushed one of his younger sisters off the sidewalk; DeLaine would not tolerate the disrespect. He pushed the boy back. The act was a major transgression in white-ruled Clarendon County. DeLaine was fortunate; he was sentenced to only twenty-five lashes for such impertinence. His father advised him to take the lashes; however, DeLaine refused and left town instead.⁴⁷ He moved to Atlanta, where he worked during the day and attended school at night. He returned to his family years later.

Once back in Clarendon County, determined to become a minister like his father, DeLaine worked while attending school. Continuing as a part-time student at Allen University in Columbia, he graduated with a bachelor of theology degree. In 1931, at the age of thirty-three, DeLaine began working to become both a preacher and a teacher.

Hired as a principal and eighth-grade teacher (earning \$50 monthly for teaching and \$10 as principal), DeLaine was set on his career path. He then married Mattie Belton, a fellow teacher at the school. Their combined salary was \$110 a month, a sum that was too considerable for some. The white authorities, thinking that was “mighty uppity” for the young couple, ordered him to fire his wife and hire a single black woman. DeLaine’s response told of his tenacity: “I’d as soon have dug a ditch with my teeth.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 6-7.

⁴⁶ Clarendon County General Notes, Section 1, 2, Loftin Mitchell Collection, Binghamton University Library.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

In 1947, while enrolled in a summer session at Allen University, DeLaine and other students attended a lecture by Reverend James M. Hinton, the man who would transform his life. Hinton had a reputation as an ordained minister who spoke his mind freely. On that occasion, he talked about the deplorable aspects of black schools, the teachers' salaries, and the busing and summed up by vociferously claiming, "No teachers or preacher in South Carolina has the courage to find a plaintiff to test the legality of the discriminatory bus-transportation practices in this state."⁴⁹

The lecture strongly affected DeLaine, who had tried to improve exactly the deplorable conditions that Hinton described. White officials rejected his requests time after time. DeLaine and a small group of blacks had tried to get a bus for black children in Clarendon County. L. B. McCord, the school superintendent and nemesis of blacks who wanted an education, had said no. DeLaine then wrote to the state superintendent of education and the attorney general of the United States; both responded that it was a local matter and should be resolved through the local school superintendent.⁵⁰ Clarendon County had allocated thirty buses to white students but not a single bus for black students.⁵¹ Black farmers in the area pooled their money and bought a used bus. DeLaine went back to McCord to request gas for the bus. McCord again refused to help.

DeLaine knew that what Hinton had proposed would lead to a battle that could possibly cost lives. He also knew that what Hinton had stated was true—something had to be done. DeLaine approached Levi Pearson and explained the situation. Levi decided to accept the risk and filed a lawsuit (July 28, 1947) against School District Number 26 of Clarendon County for school bus transportation for black children.

After months of sacrifice and hardship for Pearson, as well as intimidation of blacks associated with the lawsuit, the case of *Pearson v. County Board of Education* was thrown out of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 15.

⁵¹ Randall Kennedy, "Schoolings in Equality," *New Republic*, July 2-12, 2004, 34.

court because Pearson's farm was on the line between two school districts and he paid property taxes in the district not named in the suit. It was a devastating defeat. Nonetheless, Pearson and the others did not give up.

Pearson, DeLaine, and a small group had a meeting in Columbia with NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who promised to help if they collected the signatures of twenty blacks prepared to sign up as plaintiffs to bring a lawsuit against segregated schooling. Collecting twenty names seemed insurmountable. Black tenant farmers were rightfully afraid. If threats and intimidation were not sufficient, Pearson was a visible example that they might lose everything. There were other real cases with severe consequences. For example, a black principal of eighteen years standing at a local school was fired because whites thought he supported and encouraged Pearson in his suit.⁵²

DeLaine had exhausted every effort to get the twenty signatures until the incident with the fired black principal became a major issue. The white school officials replaced him with another black principal, who was "a bully, a thief, and a malingerer in the eyes of the black community, and probably a traitor to his race."⁵³ After attempts to get the new principal fired, which white school officials refused to do, a mass meeting took place to deal with the matter. More than 300 angry parents, students, and teachers showed up. The replacement principal and the white school board officials did not trouble themselves to show up.

At the meeting, the angry group realized that they were in need of a leader to represent their cause. They decided on DeLaine and insisted that he was the one with the intelligence and fortitude to do it. DeLaine took on the leadership role. Shortly after the meeting, DeLaine was

⁵² Ibid., 19.

⁵³ Ibid., 19.

“advised that his services as a teacher at the little school up in Silver on the Sumter Road would not be required the following fall.”⁵⁴

DeLaine organized the black community and they began to protest and file complaints. White school board officials tried many strategies to get the group to drop the suit. They did not drop the suit; it became known as *Briggs v. Elliott* (Harry Briggs, whose name was first alphabetically, was a thirty-four-year-old navy veteran. Roderick Elliott was the chairman of the school district). With its real-life political intrigue, suspense, danger, terror, and personal dedication to a noble cause, DeLaine’s story lent itself well to a dramatization.

During the early 1950s, DeLaine sat down with Mitchell in a Harlem restaurant and told him of his harrowing experiences, summarized accurately by Kluger in his book *Simple Justice*:

Before it was over, they fired him from the little schoolhouse at which he had taught devotedly for ten years. And they fired his wife and two of his sisters and a niece. And they threatened him with bodily harm. And they sued him on trumped-up charges and convicted him in a kangaroo court and left him with a judgment that denied him credit from any bank. And they burned his house to the ground while the fire department stood around watching the flames consume the night. And they stoned the church at which he pastored. And fired shotguns at him out of the dark. But he was not Job, and so fired back and called the police, who did not come and kept not coming. Then he fled... until he was across the state line. Soon after, they burned his church to the ground and charged him, for having shot back that night.... So he became an official fugitive from justice. In time, the governor of his state announced they would not pursue this minister who had caused all the trouble, and said of him: Good riddance. All of this happened because he was black and brave. And because others followed when he had decided the time had come to lead.⁵⁵

This became the basis for *A Land Beyond the River*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁵ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 3.

A Land Beyond the River: Staging an Event of Civil Rights History

A Land Beyond the River begins with two school-age children in search of Joseph Layne, the character who represents the real-life Joseph DeLaine. Before the two boys locate Layne, Mitchell takes a detour and introduces a pair of young lovers, Laura and Ben. Laura, a schoolteacher, is the daughter of Philip Turnham, a turncoat despised by all the blacks in the drama. Ben, whose father was chased out of the area because he had tried to organize a union, is a lawyer. Exposition informs the audience that Ben was the lawyer who fought the initial bus case for Clarendon County, based on *Pearson v. County Board of Education*. Mitchell uses Ben to explain the outcome in the *Pearson* case:

BEN

You know better. I withdrew from that case because the School Board proved my client paid taxes in one district and sent his kid to school in another district. On legal grounds, he couldn't sue for his kid. It was a bad test case!

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 311-312)⁵⁶

This was a devastating defeat for the blacks in Clarendon County.

The two boys finally locate Layne, who is on his way home, and deliver the message: the school floor has caved in again. Layne has to gather other fathers to repair the floor; otherwise, the children cannot attend school. Embedded in the play is the issue of kids not reaping the democratic value of education (via not being able to attend the school), which is of profound importance to parents and children. Mary, a mother, embodies the sentiments of parents who will fight for the education of their children; speaking about her son to her husband, she says:

MARY

...He ain't gonna have no school to go to less'n you do. And I don't want my child missing one single solitary day of school, you hear me? 'Cause it's real easy to miss one day, then another, and

⁵⁶ All quotes from the play are from: William R. Reardon and Thomas D. Pawley, eds., *The Black Teacher and the Dramatic Arts: A Dialogue, Bibliography, and Anthology* (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970).

another! I ain't having him growing up, not knowing nothing, and having to work like a mule!

Mary forces the issue by connecting her son's future to her husband's past. She makes it clear that she wants her son to have better opportunities than her husband did.

I ain't having him going in no Navy and being laughed at 'cause he can't read and write good! I ain't having him abused every single hour of the day 'cause he's ignorant! He's got to learn he's just as good as everybody else, and I want him to learn it good!

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 332-333)

A Land Beyond the River emphasizes the function of education as an agent to improvement while offering a moral indictment against segregation. Kenneth Clark stressed the damage of segregation to children in *Brown* and Mitchell continues the premise by dramatizing the damage of no education to children. As a representative of the child's perspective, Glenn is receptive to the attitude of education as a panacea:

GLENN

...My Pa always says he wished he coulda gone to any kinda old school, 'cause he coulda been flying airplanes in the Navy instead of lifting boxes.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 305)

Children in *A Land Beyond the River* comprehended that education is an endorsement of social and political equality. This premise enticed Layne and other parents to repair the damaged floor.

With the task of the floor on his mind, Layne arrives home only to discover that he has forgotten his wedding anniversary. Martha (a schoolteacher) understands that her husband's duties as principal and pastor leave little time and energy for her. She forgives him for the anniversary faux pas. Layne is preparing to leave when the Reverend Mr. Cloud, the white county school superintendent, and Turnham, a black principal (who is a pawn for the white establishment), arrive. The two men waste no time accusing Layne of deliberately closing his school. They threaten that if he continues to stir up trouble about the busing situation, he will be

out of a job. [As must be evident, Cloud was a stand-in for the real L. B. McCord, who was indeed a powerful man in the region, as well as the county superintendent of schools. Turnham was a stand-in for the despised black principal, who was ultimately fired by the whites who had placed him in power.]

The drama gradually moves forward while simultaneously introducing a coterie of lively characters. The Reverend Mr. Shell is the wise elder who is eager to fight for a change. Dr. Willis is a white Southerner who tells of overcoming racism when he is forced to sleep in a bed with a black man to keep warm. Mrs. Simms is the grandmotherly figure who fully supports the education battle. Then there are Bill and Mary Raigen, a couple whose love, humor, and commitment to their son's education keep them grounded. These characters, among others, represent the real individuals who were on the front line of the battle to end segregation in Clarendon Country.

Reverend Layne gathers his loyal crew. It is now night, which increases the difficulty of their task when they begin to repair the floor. Everyone is unhappy doing a job that will not solve the larger problem. They complain as they work until Martha asserts what must take place:

MARTHA

Then we got to do more! This bus fight isn't big enough. We've got to haul folks into court and make them give us decent schools! The state laws say separate but equal schools shall be provided for both races.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 342)

Once they concur that this battle is unavoidable, they factor in that death might be part of the bargain. Act 1 concludes with their singing⁵⁷ courageously, prepared to take on the challenge.

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, I could not find a recording of the singing in the play. However, playwright Phillip Hayes Dean told me that the singing added greatly to the mood and warmth created by the drama. The title of the play was taken from the song that starts the third act; it also embraces the religiosity embedded in the play:

Act 2 begins two months after Martha's call for decent schools. The Reverend Mr. Cloud arrives on stage to encounter an armed Layne, who is protecting himself against intimidation by the locals. Layne has been fired from his job as principal. Cloud, estimating that Layne is now in a vulnerable position, comes to bribe him. He is not successful. Layne plans to continue getting signatures so that he can go ahead with the suit. Turnham chimes in with his grievance against Layne:

TURNHAM

Well, let God and your congregation haul you out of the mess I'm going to get you into! I'm going to fix you good, Joe Layne! I'm going to haul you into court and sue you for slander over this petition.

(A Land Beyond the River, 352)

Layne, now aware that he is facing a suit, wastes no time organizing and transferring his land to his loyal followers. The drama moves forward; Layne encourages the group not to waver. He finally urges the group toward the action it now ought to take:

LAYNE

Yes, we'll get hold of Ben Ellis and change that petition—and sue, not for separate and equal schools, but for just schools! We'll sue

There's a land beyond the river
That we call the sweet forever,
And you only reach that shore by faith's decree—

One by one, we'll gain the portals
There to dwell with the immortals
When they ring them golden bells for you and me!

Can't you hear the bells a-ringing?
Don't you hear the angels singing?
It's Glory Hallelujah Jubilee!
One by one we'll know our number
Then, in death we'll sweetly slumber
When they ring them golden bells for you and me!

In that far-off, sweet forever,
Just beyond the shining river,
There we'll know no grief, no sorrow
In that heaven of tomorrow
When they ring them golden bells for you and me!

this state because its Jim Crow laws are breaking the United States Constitution.

(A Land Beyond the River, 372)

All the members in the small group agree to broaden the scope of their suit. They are optimistic until they get the news that Layne's house is on fire. Layne rushes home, only to see the fire department doing nothing. Martha, who has a weak heart, rushes in and sees her house in flames. It is too much for her to bear. She sinks to the ground and dies in Layne's arms.

In act 3, the crucial decision is a partial victory for the people of Clarendon County. The court ruled that the county had to furnish equal educational facilities; however, on the larger issue of segregation, the court denied the plea to abolish segregation in schools in South Carolina. While some are willing to accept the partial victory, others are disappointed and would like to continue to the Supreme Court. Layne is prepared to accept the limited victory until one of the young students appears on stage. At the apex of the dramatic resolution, two white men have attacked the little son of one of Layne's followers. The father wants retribution and prepares to go out for revenge when his injured son talks him out of it. This incident brings Layne to a realization:

LAYNE

...A Little Child Shall Lead Them." *(Then)* The voice of God has reared in my ears this terrible day, charging us with the duty of saving the souls of white children that they may grow up to be our brothers—or saving the souls of all those who have been taught hate instead of love!

(A Land Beyond the River, 391)

Layne goes on to preach a rousing sermon, emphasizing a Judeo-Christian morality as he advocates an integrationist's position. Layne wins everyone over when he sums up by reminding his followers that they started out asking for buses, "then we wanted brick schools—then we asked to go to the same schools."

Layne goes on to say:

LAYNE

For there's no such thing as being separate and equal! The only thing a man learns by being separate is that he's not equal.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 393)

Layne reaches his climax and gets an "Amen" from his small congregation when he utters, "I'm going on with this thing to the Highest Court in the World!"⁵⁸ When the inspiring sermon is over, the parishioners agree that they must take the case to the highest court in the land, the Supreme Court. Mitchell was ahead of historians when he brought a slice of contemporaneous history to life by dramatizing DeLaine's struggle to end segregation in public schools.

A Land Beyond the River was "scheduled for a ten-week run, but the public supported it, and with the exception of a hot-weather break, the play continued throughout the year."⁵⁹ Although Mitchell played fast and loose with the facts in *A Land Beyond the River*, his essential accomplishment was that audiences had an opportunity to experience a real life-and-death struggle that played a role in ending segregation.

A Land Beyond the River and Its Dramatic Scope

A Land Beyond the River is considered a problem play in that it contextualized the problem of inequality in education. Chief Justice Earl Warren observed in the *Brown* decision:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments....It is required in the performance of our most basic responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the

⁵⁸ *A Land Beyond the River*, 394.

⁵⁹ Loftin Mitchell, *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theatre* (New York: Hawthorn, 1967), 179.

state has undertaken to provide it, is a right, which must be made available to all on equal terms.⁶⁰

Mitchell won over his audience not only by addressing and dramatizing a problem that each audience member knew existed. David Hare argues that “if a play is to be a weapon in the class struggle, then that weapon is not going to be the things you are saying; it is the interaction of what you are saying and what the audience is thinking. The play is in the air.”⁶¹ Mitchell managed to intertwine what he was saying with what the audience was thinking. The Supreme Court had acknowledged the inequality in education; the reception of *A Land Beyond the River* validated that it was a prevalent issue for audience members at the Greenwich Mews Theatre. In addition, Mitchell layered his drama with several pertinent themes and issues that contributed to furthering the understanding of the links between the dramatized collective identity, solidarity, and political compatibility of the group and the framed amplification that emphasized the values and beliefs of the Civil Rights Movement. Mitchell’s handling of these themes and issues established a legitimate bridge for audiences to cross new boundaries and enter into a fuller and more defined understanding of differential experiences centered around race and its accompanying components. Therefore, it was not only education that was in the air, it was all of the themes that Mitchell wove together; they awakened the audiences and added to the success of *A Land Beyond the River*. Arguably, education was the major one, yet it was certainly not the only theme.

It is now generally agreed that education assists everyone in shaping social values, increases a sense of personal control, and provides citizens with human capital. It must be kept in mind that this was not the socialization view of education pre-*Brown* and prior to the Greenwich Mews Theatre’s production of *A Land Beyond the River*.

⁶⁰ *Brown v. Board of Education* 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

⁶¹ David Hare, *The Early Plays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972), 6.

Arnold Aronson argues that during the 1950s, “American theatre was heading into one of the most vibrant, creative, and productive periods in its history. An evolutionary process was occurring, and the American theatre was transforming into something different from what it had ever been, something that reflected the changing needs of artists and audiences alike and that could adapt more readily to a new world.”⁶² Although Aronson frames his argument around the avant-garde, it is accurate and astute--particularly in terms of what was occurring in the area of race and racialized theatre. Richard Schechner, supporting Aronson’s claim, declared that the Civil Rights Movement “has generated the deepest reappraisal of our society in this century.”⁶³ *A Land Beyond the River* was very much part of this civil rights “reappraisal” that would “adapt more readily to a new world.” The dramatic scope of *A Land Beyond the River*, while within the purview of the Civil Rights Movement, integrated other central issues that resonated within the frames of civil rights and equally reverberated in the minds of audience members. While religion, integration, nonviolence, and an emerging sentiment that advocated an empowerment of women were clearly contextualized in Mitchell’s drama, one of the central aspects integrated in *A Land Beyond the River*--one that is rarely given consideration--is the use of a black-folklore culture paradigm. By placing a literary interpretation within the black-folklore framework, Mitchell contributed to American dramatic literature.

Mitchell relies on the efficacy of theatre to communicate how powerless blacks could fight a Jim Crow system; he shows how participation in collective action can produce change. Civil rights organizations were entering that political period in which they wanted the type of direct participation advocated in *A Land Beyond the River*. Furthermore, the drama showed people suffering and overcoming the hardship by direct action. *A Land Beyond the River* advocated

⁶² Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 1.

⁶³ Richard Schechner, “Ford, Rockefeller, and Theatre,” *Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 1 (Autumn 1965): 24.

direct action; Aldon Morris comments on the value of direct action, “Many people, when they are suffering and they see their people suffering; they want direct participation. ...So you put into the hands of all kinds of ordinary people a positive alternative to powerlessness and frustration. That’s one of the great things about direct action.”⁶⁴

By dramatizing how people were suffering, Mitchell relies on what Johan Galtung refers to as the *amplification approach*. Quintessentially, by dramatizing the effects of the opponent’s discriminatory behavior, the nonviolent person places his opponent in the midst of a crisis, confronts him with the moral problems, and draws public attention to the issue.⁶⁵ What is vital about Mitchell’s method in this instance is that it connects politics, theatre, and civil rights organizations to bring about an overwhelming transformation in the consciousness of the audience while providing authenticity. He relied on a folk-culture paradigm to reveal a group of poor blacks who fought a central battle while maintaining their dignity to overcome a racial struggle.

Inherent Characteristics of Black-Folklore Culture

A common view in the Harlem Renaissance was that black-folklore culture was a crucial basis for all black artistic development. Alain Locke, specifically addressing drama, notes:

I hope, later art of the Negro will be true to original qualities of the folk temperament, though it may not perpetuate them in readily recognizable form. For the folk temperament raised to the levels of conscious art promises more originality and beauty than any assumed or imitated class or national or clique psychology available. ...the real future of Negro drama lies with the development of the folk play. Negro drama must grow in its own soil and cultivate its own intrinsic elements; only in this way can it become truly organic and cease being a rootless derivative.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Aldon Morris, “A Retrospective on the Civil Rights Movement: Political and Intellectual Landmarks,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (August 1999): 527.

⁶⁵ Johan Galtung, “On the Meaning of Nonviolence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 2, no. 3 (1965): 247-248.

⁶⁶ Alain Locke, “Beauty Instead of Ashes,” *Nation*, April 18, 1928, 434.

Locke and other black scholars were not the only ones who encouraged the black folk tradition.

The German director Max Reinhardt offered:

...be original--sense the folk spirit, develop the folk-idiom—artistically, of course, but faithfully; and above all, do not let that technique of expression which is so original, so potential, get smothered out in the imitation of European acting, copied effect.⁶⁷

Ralph Ellison added support to what Locke and Reinhardt asserted:

Negro folklore, evolving within a larger culture which regarded it as inferior, was an especially courageous expression. It announced the Negro's willingness to trust his own experience, his own sensibilities as to the definition of reality, rather than allow his masters to define these crucial matters for him.⁶⁸

Susan Blake goes further, arguing that Ellison “singled out black folklore as the source of genuine black definition.”⁶⁹ During the time of Mitchell’s *A Land Beyond the River*, it was understood that black folklore existed within the realm of a larger white culture. Nonetheless, Mitchell emphasized the theoretical issue involved in what was termed “Negro Folklore.” Folklore traditionally has been conceptualized as a homogeneous category. All cultures have folklore, which varies from culture to culture. At the time, the use of black folklore expressed a unique pride in the race. Mitchell indeed relied on black folklore, linking it to the politics of the day.

Mitchell not only engaged political theatre to effect a social change; he also found a way for rural blacks to voice their critiques of political forces oppressing them. Acknowledging the

⁶⁷ Alain Locke, “Should the Negro Be Encouraged to Cultural Equality? A Debate: The High Cost of Prejudice,” *Forum* 78, no. 4 (October 1927): 507.

⁶⁸ Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1953), 172.

⁶⁹ Susan Blake, “Ritual and Rationalization: Black Folklore in the work of Ralph Ellison,” *PMLA* 94, no. 1 (January 1979): 121. [Not to get bogged down by defining folklore, I relied on how it was used by Alan Dundes: Alan Dundes, ed., *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel: Readings in the Interpretation of Afro-American Folklore* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990)..

value of black-folklore culture in his drama, he stated, “I was happy to be able to bring to the stage a group of ‘simple’ human beings I had met through the years.”⁷⁰

It must not be overlooked that this poor, rural class of blacks was new to many audiences. Mitchell provided authentic insights into their lives, carefully rejecting superstitions and mystic beliefs. He relied on the folkloric cultural circumstances to reveal the characters’ humanitarian desire for political and social justice. He did not venture to explore or reveal the attitudes of un-Christian, undemocratic, or un-American characters.

Honoring the position of Locke, Reinhardt, and Ellison on folk culture, this group of simple individuals developed an oppositional consciousness--a willingness to make sacrifices that could have caused them to lose jobs or that endangered their physical well-being. This is a theme that Mitchell made clear in his play:

LAYNE

All right! If this is the kind of fight you want, let’s face this: It won’t be just one or two of us suing. We’re going to have to get a whole heap of names on some kind of a petition, authorizing Ben Ellis and his organization to represent us in court.

RUBY

Then, we’ll get them!

SHELL

For the bus case, we only needed one.

LAYNE

This is different. If it’s only one or two, somebody might move away or withdraw—

DUFF

Or get killed.

LAYNE

Or get killed.

RUBY

Oh, look. Ain’t no sense in going into a whole lot of Who-Struck-John and Why! Start up that petition, or what-in-ever you call it!

BILL

Yeah!

RUBY

Ain’t nobody here looking for no picnic!

⁷⁰ Mitchell, *Black Drama*, 180.

J. C.

We can take all the hell they wanta give us!

RUBY

A body can die but once, and it might as well be for something like this! (*She nudges Duff.*)

DUFF

I ain't say a word against it.

LAYNE

(*Looks up*) "Out of darkness I cried unto Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my prayer." If any soul has to die in this, let it be me! Let it be me!

MARTHA

It won't be just you, Joe. It'll be all of us! Now is the time! Now is the time to shout in righteous indignation!

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 344-345)

This passage, at the end of act 1, not only testifies that African Americans were so fed up that they were willing to risk their lives, it also depicts features that served the Civil Rights Movement in ways that were not so obvious. First, audiences had the opportunity to see the political socialization of powerless African Americans taking control to make a change. Before 1954, desegregation strategies came predominately from professionals in civil rights organizations. What *A Land Beyond the River* endorses is "the transfer of initiative for change from the hands of a relatively few civil rights professionals, religious leaders, and 'white liberals' to the broad back of militant individuals of every color and calling."⁷¹ Poor, rural, Southern, and powerless, Reverend Layne and his followers took control and relied on collective action to bring about a political change.

Another significant point concerning the folklore-cultural paradigm that should not be overlooked, Mitchell contextualized the activism success within a frame that characterized a grassroots movement with grassroots strategies. Absent were mass demonstrations or historical

⁷¹ James H. Laue, "The Changing Character of Negro Protest," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 357 (January 1965): 120.

accounts of major participants. Mitchell consigned the success to simple assertions of humanity—a simple preacher leads his flock.

Layne occupying the space of a preacher is significant. This is not to be understated or undervalued because religion's ideational repository was connected to the Civil Rights Movement. This is to contend (as do all the chapters here with the exception of chapter 4) that religion contributed a positive impact to the success of the Civil Rights Movement. Given the fact that black preachers placed prominently in the black leadership category during the Civil Rights Movement, Layne's leadership role in the struggle for education should not come as a surprise. The black-folklore culture traditionally embraced religion, particularly for rural blacks. Mitchell employed aspects of religiosity to engage a sociopolitical consciousness. (More about religion and its role in *A Land Beyond the River* later.)

Sociologist James McKee argues that "prior to the Movement, sociologists viewed Southern Blacks as a culturally inferior, backward people." He goes on to state, "there was a logical extension of this image of the American Black: a people so culturally inferior would lack the capability to advance their own interests by rational action. Blacks were portrayed as a people unable on their own to effect changes in race relations."⁷² *A Land Beyond the River* participates in correcting this misconception by showing that African Americans could achieve change. Mitchell showed that these were not inferior people in an inferior culture.

Layne's group (black, poor, Southern, rural and considered powerless) defied the odds, took control and made a difference. One significant factor that is not appreciated about *A Land Beyond the River* is that as a theatrical representation of the black struggling-class, it enriched the understanding of injustice while providing audiences with an understanding of the politics that

⁷² James B. McKee, *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 8.

imposed severe restrictions on the lives of that class. The point here is that Mitchell, working within the black folk-culture paradigm, provided audiences the opportunity to witness how politics forced insurgency upon a poor, powerless group; he revealed how, using their own language, they took charge of their political outcome.

A word or two about the language Mitchell employed: hardly worth mentioning for it is self-evident, to know what a word means, it is necessary to pay attention to the circumstances surrounding its use. Language is the conduit that enables individuals to act upon structures; it also enhances the cultural form that activates transformation. The language of *A Land Beyond the River* relies on presenting dissatisfactions and aspirations of characters; it is a language that lends itself to the characters in this folk-culture paradigm.

Mitchell, siding with theatre language traditionalists, conscientiously weighed the language in *A Land Beyond the River*. The speech is common, relying on a natural poetry to fit the rural characters. The language offers ordinary meanings, not attaching itself to ambiguity or confusion of thought. Edwin Block argues (which addresses the linguistic concern of *A Land Beyond the River*):

Language need not be flowery or rhetorical. It need not be Shakespearean. But it must be able to evoke the unseen, the mysterious, that which is beyond glib, conceptual understanding and hence dismissal or manipulation.⁷³

Mitchell relied on and borrowed the language of rural blacks; it was grounded in authenticity and evoked the reality of the predicament. This does not mean that the language did not have its poetical quality. The realistic dialogue did offer its metaphorical and lyrical quality:

RUBY

Honey, ain't I told you—no need to be scared. We gonna sit right here and this old night's gonna lift its ugly head. Gonna be

⁷³ Ed Block, "Drama and Religious Experience, or Why Theatre Still Matters," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 82.

sunshine all over the road soon. And your Pa's gonna come stumbling in here with a whole lot of excuses about where he was last night.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 361)

BILL

(*Still looking at the land*) 'Cause that rock yonder's got to be moved so she'll slope off right and be level from the brook clear on out to the road. And if the corn comes high this year, gonna have a purty picture with it levelin' off against the trees back yonder. Don't you think so?

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 361)

MARTHA

Seems like those two think the whispering is too loud as it is. (*Quietly*) There is a whispering, Joe—a stirring, like the leaves being torn by the wind when a storm's coming up. Joe, somebody's got to listen to it.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 361)

Mitchell's dramatic writing supports the concept that what makes a work of art worthwhile is its ability to satisfy and to touch deeply. He used a folksy, inoffensive language while cognizant of a traditional approach to dramatic writing. Mitchell's dialogue fused with the ideas and goals of the Civil Rights Movement, adhering to the political impulse of the time. Mitchell's was a language of progress—it accommodated the folk-culture paradigm.

Black-folklore culture has historically portrayed ordinary people, relying on their own language to do so; among them, there often exists a black preacher. Such a role in *A Land Beyond the River* is not unusual. The black preacher/minister traditionally served many functions in black neighborhoods, but he/she frequently served in the role of political leader. As a point of fact, black preachers have traditionally been ranked high in the most prominent black-leadership categories; black churches have traditionally (particularly during the Civil Rights Movement era) been among the most dominant and influential institutions of blacks. Two authors who argued that “Black churches have carried burdens and performed roles and functions beyond their specifically religious ones in politics, economics, education, music, and

culture” have captured the significance of the black church.⁷⁴ Thus, the black preacher, regardless if traditionalist, moderate, or militant, played a crucial role in changing the social and political verity for blacks. This is to augment that Joseph DeLaine was the excellent candidate for Mitchell’s drama, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Greenwich Mews Theatre, with its religious connection sponsorship by the Village Presbyterian Church and the Brotherhood Synagogue. Working within the folkloric cultural paradigm, Mitchell considered the complex relationship between religion and politics. This brings the focus back to religiosity and its connection to *A Land Beyond the River*.

Religiosity and Its Incorporation in *A Land Beyond the River*

Anthony Orum argues that lower-class blacks were more likely to belong to political and church groups than were their white counterparts,⁷⁵ which connects to the assertion that there is (and always has been) a high degree of religiosity among blacks as a group. Religiosity serves a wide spectrum of interests for blacks, ranging from fostering “both accommodation and protest, the nonviolence of a Martin Luther King as well as the fury of a Nat Turner and a Malcolm X,”⁷⁶ as asserted by Manning Marable. Marable, connecting the Civil Rights Movement to religion, goes on to contend, “The Civil Rights Movement, although explicitly integrationist in its cultural impetus, was a secular movement which drew heavily from the expressions of Black rituals and Black faith.”⁷⁷ [There will be more about integration later.] There is much evidence in *A Land Beyond the River* to support a strong connection between politicization and the religiosity of blacks. Whatever position may be put forth, it is inarguable that the black church, especially

⁷⁴ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, “In the Receding Shadow of the Plantation: A Profile of Rural Clergy and Churches in the Black Belt,” *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 4, Black Religion in the Twentieth Century (June 1988): 350.

⁷⁵ Anthony M. Orum, “A Reappraisal of the Social and Political Participation of Negroes,” *American Journal of Sociology* 72, no. 1 (July 1966): 32.

⁷⁶ Manning Marable, “Religion and Black Protest Thought in African American History,” in *African American Religious Studies: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. Gayraud S. Wilmore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 336.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.

during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, was the most dominant and influential institution of blacks.

By hypothesizing that religion is the “opium of the people,” Karl Marx legitimized the notion that religion functions as an agent of escape. On the opposite side of the escapist position, opponents of Marx argue that religion functions also as a creative and political force, both as a palliative and as a positive force. Gary Marx acknowledged the escapist interpretation of religion while recognizing that religion also makes positive impacts on society.⁷⁸ Religion and the black church have been considered the adhesive of black society. This is not to argue that the black church is a monolithic institution; nonetheless, the black church has been important for the socialization and politicization of blacks. Many scholars (E. Franklin Frazier,⁷⁹ C. Eric Lincoln,⁸⁰ and Frederick Harris⁸¹ are among them) argue that black political participation has been encouraged by the black church. This was particularly true during the Civil Rights Movement, when politicized black churches advocated activism and contributed to the continuity of civil rights protest. The black church mobilized collective action, mediated social action, and politicized people for action. Therein lies the significance of *A Land Beyond the River*; it not only taps into the politicoreligious urgings of the Civil Rights Movement, it also illuminates the cultural code of drama, substantiating and revealing how the church culture expressed and provided meaning for the action of uplift. While this chapter celebrates the importance of theatre and drama, it does not intentionally offer support to the argument, one that has been made in the past, that theatre is more powerful than the church.⁸²

⁷⁸ Gary T. Marx, “Religion: Opiate or Inspiration of Civil Rights Militancy Among Negroes?” *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (1967): 64-72.

⁷⁹ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: Schocken, 1974).

⁸⁰ C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken, 1974).

⁸¹ Frederick C. Harris, “Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African-American Political Activism,” *Journal of Politics* 56, no. 1 (February 1994): 42-68.

⁸² “Is the Theatre More Powerful Than the Church?” *Washington Post*, November 16, 1924, SM3.

A Land Beyond the River indoctrinates the quintessence of religiosity by the three ministers in its cast, and the script is saturated with the impetus that God will resolve, improve, or make right any predicament. For example, Reverend Layne rejects the advice to leave the area for his own safety then devoutly affirms, “I’m not leaving here until God tells me to leave.”⁸³ Another example: the group is under gunfire and Reverend Layne pleads, “God give us strength to find a way,”⁸⁴ while Mary utters, “God, don’t let this happen to us.”⁸⁵ But nothing compares to the potent impact of the song the entire group sings:

I’m going to tell God all my troubles when I get home.
 I’m going to tell God all my troubles when I get home.
 I’m going to fall down on my knees and pray
 Cause I wanta meet Him on the Judgment Day.
 I’m going to tell God All my troubles when I get home.

I’m going to tell God how you been a-treating me
 when I get home.
 I’m going to tell God how you been a-treating me
 when I get home.
 I’m going to set down beside my mother—
 Yes, I’m going to tell it to my sister and brother—
 I’m going to tell ‘em about my troubles when I get home.
(*A Land Beyond the River*, 352)

The spiritual afterlife is part of the overall concept, which incorporates and encourages a down-to-earth political activism.

Framed within the dramatic context of *A Land Beyond the River*, black religiosity is a weapon for social change--it embraces liberative action through political activism. Therefore, while engaged in a black-folklore culture paradigm, religiosity serves as an agent to allow those individuals to feel part of the political mobilization through the power of God. With his play,

⁸³ *A Land Beyond the River*, 347.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Mitchell honored the connection between the black church (religiosity) and the Civil Rights Movement.

Considering the black church and the black-religious culture, it is worthy of stressing (while arguing that the relationship between religion and politics is multifaceted and complex) that the black church embraced and advocated other central issues that were crucial to the success of the Civil Rights Movement. Two of those dramatized in *A Land Beyond the River* were integration and nonviolence.

Integration and Its Place in *A Land Beyond the River*

As argued earlier, education is central to democracy, yet education was only part of a larger picture in Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River*. Integration and nonviolence (much more about both in later chapters) were compatible with the ideological foundation of the Greenwich Mews Theatre and civil rights organizations. Integration, one of the key ideological watchwords, was framed as a way to overcome racism and oppression.⁸⁶ The Civil Rights Movement was unquestionably the social movement of the twentieth century that changed the racial politics in the United States while simultaneously forcing citizens to adhere to the central core of democracy. Integration was one of the central notions attached to the black liberation struggle of the time. Integration, in staunch opposition to segregation, signified equality and inclusion.

During the 1950s, the nation began to embrace the ideal of equality and came to believe that integration was the best route to achieve it. The concept of integration facilitated a political realignment that improved chances for African Americans to gain equality, but that did not mean that segregationist practices discontinued. However, racial integration was working in the air

⁸⁶ Steve Valocchi, "The Emergence of the Integrationist Ideology in the Civil Rights Movement," *Social Problems* 43, no. 1 (February 1996): 117.

force,⁸⁷ hospitals,⁸⁸ churches,⁸⁹ fire departments,⁹⁰ bar associations,⁹¹ YMCAs,⁹² summer camps⁹³—integration even conquered the Morrisania section of the Bronx during the 1950s.⁹⁴ Vice President Richard M. Nixon conceded at that time that the “prejudices and fears about racial integration would break down and eventually disappear.”⁹⁵ Thus, when Mitchell privileged integration as the primary means to achieve equality in *A Land Beyond the River*, he was supporting an emerging position that would serve the play.

By favoring integration as a dramatic choice, Mitchell relied on a nonthreatening political ideology that was in vogue to educate the audience while politicizing the plight of African Americans. Layne, the character everyone respects, articulates his doubts about integration. Shortly after the decision was rendered that “separate but equal” was legal, Layne takes more of a nationalist’s position:

LAYNE

Well, we don’t want that part, anyway! We don’t want our kids going to school with their kids, where they can learn how to make bombs and burn homes and lynch folks! We don’t want to be with them and their crucifying souls!

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 384)

Layne’s nationalist stance is short-lived. The drama strives toward a climax to bring about Layne’s transformation into a complete integrationist. Not only African Americans espoused integration as central to racial progress in *A Land Beyond the River*; Doc Willis, one of two

⁸⁷ John N. Norris, “AF Report Praises Racial Integration,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, March 27, 1950, 5.

⁸⁸ “Columbia Hospital Has Integration,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, January 5, 1954, 25.

⁸⁹ Kenneth Dole, “Church Integration Program Announced,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 28, 1954, 20. [While many churches, white and black, advocated integration, many white preachers/ministers faced the wrath of their congregations for their support of integration and goals of the Civil Rights Movement.]

⁹⁰ “Integration of Firemen Is Smooth,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 19, 1954, M17.

⁹¹ “Integrated Bar,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, December 11, 1954, 10.

⁹² “Last All-Negro ‘Y’ in City Will Close,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1955, 29.

⁹³ Roi Ottley, “Says Popularity of Interracial Summer Camps Is Rising,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 19, 1955, N11.

⁹⁴ “Integration Gain Seen,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1956, 15.

⁹⁵ “Nixon Cites Integration Gains Here,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, February 14, 1955, 10.

white characters in the drama, supports integration by giving his account of how he came to know African Americans:

WILLIS

...When I first started practicing around here, I didn't like being around colored folks a bit. Well, one night old Sam Smith got sick up yonder in the hills. Well, no matter what I thought of folks, I couldn't let 'em die. So I drove all the way up in the hills and doctored on old Sam. Wild storm come up and blowed trees all over the road. Was no way of getting out of there till morning. Sam told me I'd better stay all night. He didn't have but one bed, though, and I sure wasn't going to sleep with no colored man! I tried sitting up in a chair all night, but the wind came howling through the boards, the fire went out, and pretty soon I got cold! Long about three A.M. I crawled on in that bed beside old Sam and covered up, nice and warm. Next morning I woke up the same man. Hadn't been tarnished a bit! I always figured though, that if I'd started off knowing something about colored folks, I'd have gotten me a full night's sleep up at old Sam's.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 348)

Mitchell relied on integration as an integrative rhetorical strategy, linking politics to a cultural imperative. His meticulous arrangement of integration moved his audience to accept his claim that *A Land Beyond the River* constructs a network of relationships, linking meanings and outcomes to the Civil Rights Movement. That argument also attaches itself to nonviolence.

Nonviolence, Invading *A Land Beyond the River*

With Doc Willis and Reverend Layne, you had a man of medicine and a man of God advocating integration as a pathway to the surging social revolution. Nonviolence as a political strategy was every bit as pertinent to the Movement as integration. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in the South, is often characterized as a nonviolent revolution. After the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955-1956, Martin Luther King Jr. commanded the attention of the nation with his philosophy and commitment to the method of nonviolent resistance. Although nonviolence as a political strategy in the Movement is attributed to King, "the fact is that there had existed since 1943 a small but active organization

specializing in nonviolent action against racial discrimination—the Congress of Racial Equality [CORE].”⁹⁶ The masthead of CORE’s newsletter stated among its goals: “To abolish racial discrimination through application of the Gandhian philosophy and techniques of nonviolent direct action.”⁹⁷ In 1957, when King established the Southern Christian Leadership, its newsletter’s masthead stated, “To achieve full citizenship rights, and total integration of the Negro in American life...to disseminate the creative philosophy and technique of nonviolence.”⁹⁸

That ideology of nonviolent resistance was emerging during the 1950s in tandem with the Civil Rights Movement. However, the ethos of nonviolence did not have a solid foundation in 1957 when *A Land Beyond the River* arrived at the Greenwich Mews Theatre. King was still in the nascent stage of formalizing his philosophy to educate his audience about nonviolence. He was making speeches⁹⁹ and arguing that nonviolence was the political tool of justice that would break the backs of segregationists.¹⁰⁰ As he was marketing his agenda to potential participants, *A Land Beyond the River* opened to critical success, advocating nonviolence as the pivotal strategy to achieve racial justice.

Although a minister’s house is burned to the ground, a group is shot at, and adult bullies beat up a child, *A Land Beyond the River* held steadfast to the ideology of nonviolence throughout. Two illustrations highlight this point. In the first, Martha prepares Bill for the reality of nonviolence:

MARTHA

That’s exactly why Joe doesn’t want you at home. Because he knows what you’ll do. And that’s what they want—to rile us up so

⁹⁶ Bo Wirmark, “Nonviolent Methods and the American Civil Rights Movement 1955-1965,” *Journal of Peace Research* 11, no. 2 (1974): 117.

⁹⁷ Laue, “The Changing Character,” 124.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ “Nonviolence Stressed: Montgomery Negro Leader Urges Campaign Continue,” *New York Times*, January 14, 1957, 14.

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth Dole, “Crowd Hails King in Talk at Howard,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, November 11, 1957, B2.

much we'll strike back. And when we do that, Bill, we've lost. *(Then)* Grow up, Bill! And get used to this—for there's more coming. More shooting and slander and spitting in faces. Lots more before the end...

(A Land Beyond the River, 360)

In the second one, Bill is not convinced that he should continue to turn the other cheek:

BILL

I can't be listening to no more gunfire! I can't be letting folks shoot at me and do nothing about it! I'm going home and get my gun, Rev. I know how to stop these folks. One shot in the night and they'll go running.

LAYNE

Bill, you just can't go out shooting people!

BILL

I been waiting on you to tell me why I can't, but you ain't!

LAYNE

I don't have an answer, Bill. And I can't stop you, either. All I can tell you is, every bit of my body says, "Go with him! Shoot back!" My hands are aching for them! *(Then)* But, there's something else holding me back—telling me that even if a white man walked into this church and stuck a gun in my face, I'd have to get on my knees and pray for him. I'd have to pray for him because he's sick deep down inside his soul! God Almighty, you're calling on me to have the guts to let people kill me! *(Turns to Bill)* So—you go on home if you want to, Bill. I don't know if I've got the right to ask you to turn the other cheek.

(A Land Beyond the River, 367-368)

Bill still resists the concept of nonviolence:

BILL

What you expect me to do when somebody throws a stone at me?

SHELL

Not fight. Return hate with love--

(A Land Beyond the River, 381)

After much resistance, Bill finally begins to understand the bravery that is required for the nonviolence strategy.

During the mid-1960s, that strategy broke down and violence and militancy replaced it (this will be discussed in chapter 4). In retrospect, nonviolent resistance was a potent weapon for African Americans in their struggle for freedom. On the opposite side, there were those individuals who picked up arms to defend their lives and property and battle for human rights. Armed resistance played a significant role in African-American communities early on during the civil rights struggle. Michael Howard, the director of the 1957 production, stated that the ideology of nonviolence was still new to the cast and that many of the cast members, as he did, favored not turning the other cheek. Howard made it clear that there were concerns about the viability of nonviolence as a strategy:

Nonviolence was new for me. I didn't quite understand it. We had a lot of discussion about it. Some of the members of the cast felt that "if someone hit you, you hit them back." We talked about it and we learned from the play. The concept of nonviolence became more important later on. Yes, the play was advocating nonviolence, and of course, it happened in the play. But I didn't know a lot about nonviolence at that point. I understood Gandhi, but for me, I understood African Americans standing up for themselves and for their rights. I was familiar with the concept of African Americans saying, "I'll do it." "I will stand up for myself." "You hit me and I'll hit you back." That was such a powerful thing at that time. The play was advocating the concept of nonviolence but nonviolence was developing, it was ongoing--a developing message. We were learning about all of this. The concept of nonviolence needed a Martin Luther King. It needed a voice to express it, to lay it out, to say how and why it could work as a political strategy—not because it is good but because we will get what we should have in the universe if we pursue this, believe in this, live this way. We sensed all of this in the play. We could see it as a germ. Loften understood it more than we did. More importantly, the audience got it—they got it from the people's stories. No, we cannot bang down the doors—that idea [nonviolence] had not taken root yet in the world, at that time. The idea of nonviolence could have died without a Martin Luther King. Someone had to take the idea and lift it up, and that was King.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Michael Howard, interview with author (April 11, 2006).

Despite Howard's uncertainty about nonviolence, it is now recognized that the Civil Rights Movement was unarguably the defining moment and most accessible example of nonviolent resistance to injustice in America.

Mitchell was being sincere in reference to the issues he relied on or positions he advocated in his play. As an African-American dramatist seeking recognition in mainstream terms, he was balancing what the drama required with what was favorable to the Greenwich Mews Theatre, the Civil Rights Movement, and his audiences. As to the dramatic scope of *A Land Beyond the River*, education was an issue that was presented to Mitchell. Nonviolence and integration were issues that subsequently proved to be part of the peace-making political process. Nonetheless, as an ideological recipient and a producer of ideas, Mitchell was ahead of his time by relying on the two issues and contextualizing them in the way he did. By integrating his drama with ideological premises of integration and nonviolence, Mitchell employed a sociolinguistic analysis of what was to come. Another key aspect that Mitchell dramatized, again he was in front of history, was the historical role of women in the Movement. What is missing from any analysis of Mitchell's drama is the gender politics. In spite of the fact that the play is saturated with it, theatre scholars and writers resisted the notion that *A Land Beyond the River* had any interest in gender politics. Mitchell showed how women established bridges and crossed boundaries between families, politics, and civil rights participation.

Women's Place in the Movement via *A Land Beyond the River*

Essential to the theatre's responsibility in shaping American culture is to be honest. Mitchell endorses what Brooks Atkinson had stressed early in 1950:

The nature of art is to tell the truth about life in the world and in the universe, in case a dramatist is able to go that far, as some of them can. Whether the truth is pleasant or unpleasant, soothing or distasteful, is beside the point, for nothing can be done to cure the

maladies of the human race unless the diagnosis is based on all the truth that is available. We have to know the worst as well as the best.¹⁰²

A large part of telling the truth means acknowledging what actually existed. There has been a great deal written about women not receiving their due acknowledgement for their participation in the Movement. Until recently, their contributions have been overlooked or diminished by historians and scholars. Historically, women were active in many of the major Civil Rights Movement organizations.¹⁰³ In *A Land Beyond the River*, Mitchell dramatized the importance of African-American women and their roles in the Civil Rights Movement. Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Diane Nash, Dorothy Height, and Vivian Malone Jones are only a few of the better-known women who played indispensable roles in that struggle. Many others played pivotal behind-the-scenes roles “that enabled the movement to perform the multi-faceted, mobilization and organizational tasks crucial for wide-scale collective action.”¹⁰⁴ While it is acknowledged that women were excluded from formal leadership positions, Belinda Robnett argued, “Often, the purveyors of the movement’s message were women.”¹⁰⁵

Mitchell dramatizes how women, though relegated to minor positions, did influence major decisions. Martha, by asserting herself, plays a key role in making sure that the education suit would continue. She diplomatically reminds Layne of what he would have done during his younger days--in effect, what he should do:

MARTHA

I remember, too, a young Joe Layne on a college campus. Son of a country preacher. Big, strong, fearless, believing people in the

¹⁰² Brooks Atkinson, “Morality of Art,” *New York Times*, June 4, 1950, X1.

¹⁰³ [CORE, Congress of Racial Equality; NAACP, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; WPC, Women’s Political Council; SNCC, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference; MIA, Montgomery Improvement Association; MFDP, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, etc.]

¹⁰⁴ Morris, “A Retrospective,” 536.

¹⁰⁵ Belinda Robnett, “African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership, and Micromobilization,” *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no.6 (May 1996): 1663. [For further reading, see Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African American Women and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).]

country needed preachers and teachers, on fire to get the world right...setting me on fire...

LAYNE

You know some of our own people think even this bus fight is too much...

MARTHA

The young Joe Layne...that was a boy who was shouting, not whispering...one who was leading a fight, not dancing on the edges of one.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 321)

Martha is not alone in influencing decisions. There is the dramatic incident in which Bill, who has assisted in repairing the floor at the dilapidated school too many times, adamantly refuses to offer his services this time. Bill is furious and firm in his decision until his wife stands her ground.

Mitchell not only provides Mary with the dramatic ammunition to persuade Bill, he also manages to emphasize the theme of education, stressing its political and cultural values for the audience. The passion in Mary's speech surely registers with the passion that DeLaine conveyed to Mitchell: "It broke my heart to see the little Negro children walking through mud and dirt to get to school. Sometimes we had to scrub them off before starting class. And on their way back and forth white kids would pass them, riding buses, and shouting and throwing things at them."¹⁰⁶

Layne had gathered the other men and they are all irritated while attempting to repair the floor. They are all disappointed with the result. The more work they do on the floor, the more work they must do. Finally, they conclude that the floor is unrepairable. The men are exhausted, defeated; there is no solution available. Bernice Barnett¹⁰⁷ is one of many scholars who finally

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell, *Black Drama*, 173.

¹⁰⁷ Bernice McNair Barnett, "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class," *Gender and Society* 7, no. 2 (June 1983): 163.

acknowledged that women formulated strategies and tactics and made crucial decisions, as in *A Land Beyond the River* when the men have no idea what should be the next step. Martha suggests what that is:

MARTHA

Then we've got to do more! This bus fight isn't big enough. We've got to haul these folks into court and make them give us decent schools! The state laws say separate but equal schools shall be provided for both races.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 342)

While many are ready for this fight, there are those who would do everything to avoid it.

Women are also the ones who force their cowardly spouses to stand up and fight. Mitchell dramatizes this with his characters Duff and Ruby. Duff wants to go home to avoid the battle.

Ruby thinks otherwise:

RUBY

What you doing?

DUFF

Getting ready to get on home and let these colored folks go on fighting like they doing.

RUBY

You mean—you walking out?

DUFF

Fast as I can! You heard them talking about suing to be equal with white folks? And these colored folks here been fighting even 'fore they get to suing. If they acting like that now, I know good and well soon as old white man says "Boo" to 'em they gonna start backing up! And I ain't gonna have my toes around for them to back up on!

RUBY

You just better sit down over there and quit hollering.

DUFF

Get ready if you going home with me.

RUBY

I ain't going home with you. (*He looks at her.*) You heard what I said!

DUFF

Woman, you gone crazy?

RUBY

No, sir, I ain't. You walk outa here now, and I ain't putting myself in your bed no more!

DUFF

Ruby, get some sense!

RUBY

I got some! That's why I ain't letting Willie Lee go to no shack if I can do something about it. So, I don't care how much fighting these folks doing, 'long as they fighting. If you wanta stay married to me, you just sit over there and be quiet! (*Duff starts to move away. She stops him with her voice.*) Man, you heard me talk to you! (*Duff turns, suddenly. He is beaten and he knows it. The others laugh. Duff sits.*) (*Ruby continues*) Reverend, y'all was talking. 'Scuse me for butting in. Y'll talk on.

(*A Land Beyond the River, 343-344*)

The drama not only reveals women wielding power, sexual and otherwise, to influence decisions ultimately made by their men, it shows women stepping outside the spousal paradigm to offer resistance against patriarchy. For example, Superintendent Cloud tries to bribe Layne, who has been fired from his job as school principal, by offering to make his wife (Martha) principal of a school if Layne will forgo his "agitating." Martha, without any discussion with her husband, shocks Cloud with her decision:

MARTHA

You've got a lot of nerve! Expect my resignation in the morning.
(*A Land Beyond the River, 351*)

Then there is the ultimate resistance against patriarchy. Laura decides to remain with Layne and the others, turning against her own father:

TURNHAM

Laura—I've been looking for you. (*She is silent.*) I want you to come home. You don't belong with these people.

LAURA

For the first time in my life I belong somewhere.

TURNHAM

They'll hurt you, Laura. They're no good. (*Bitterly*) They made me lose my job. Mr. Cloud just fired me. Said I'm no good to him—that I can't make these folks behave! (*Then*) Come home.

LAURA

No.

TURNHAM

It gets dark early up there in the house.

LAURA

It's been dark. It's been dark for many a year. I can't go back,
Papa.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 385)

Finally, a woman plays a key role in urging the group not to settle for a compromise. The news of the court decision has arrived. The court rendered a partial victory:

LAYNE

We lost in words. The judges said segregation is legal, but the
state has to make the schools equal.

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 382)

While many are happy with that, it is a woman who is not prepared to celebrate half a victory.

Old Mrs. Simms asks the critical question:

MRS. SIMMS

That all there is to it, son? Ain't we suing no more?

(*A Land Beyond the River*, 384)

Women played vital roles in decisions that affected the civil rights struggle, and their impact on the polity of the Civil Rights Movement is undeniable. Mitchell honors this by dramatizing his women characters entering the intellectual, cultural, epistemological, and philosophical spheres, where they invest in the political decision-making process. In *A Land Beyond the River*, the women's political and strategic effectiveness validates their power, showing that it is consolidated, absorbed, and incorporated with male power while offering support for the civil rights struggle. The play reflects historical actualities that represent aspects of reality.

A Land Beyond the River offered challenges to the prevailing political order. Mitchell not only relied on gender politics to shore up an authoritarian, patriarchal order. There is also the integration of unions into the dramatic blend. This is not to imply that unions were an apt

panacea for the ills of race-related predicaments. It merely suggests that the union was a vital entity included in Mitchell's dramatization.

Labor Unions and Their Connection to *A Land Beyond the River*

Employment was one sure route to decrease poverty for African Americans. Leaders of civil rights organizations understood that productive relationships with unions would result in increased employment for African Americans. Some labor unions had espoused for years a commitment to the same objectives as civil rights organizations;¹⁰⁸ some had even gone as far as to pledge in writing "to encourage all workers without regard to race, creed, color or national origin to share in the full benefits of union organization."¹⁰⁹ Even while rabid white-supremacy tacticians fought to keep African Americans out of unions, "The great majority of Southern unions have declared themselves unequivocally in support of integration."¹¹⁰ Just as the time was propitious for progressive steps in the direction of civil rights, the time had arrived for unions to promote integration among their own membership.¹¹¹ Approximately one year after the opening of *A Land Beyond the River*, civil rights organizations started to attack their "allies in the labor movement for abdicating their responsibility in regard to erasing the color line within the trade unions."¹¹²

During the 1950s, cooperation began between labor unions and African Americans as never before, involving increased activities to improve the situation of African Americans in unions. African Americans began not only to seek employment via unions but also to support them. That cooperation came at an odd period. Labor unions had their problems during the 1950s; this is a point that Nelson Lichtenstein affirmed, arguing, "During the 1950s and 1960s the reputation

¹⁰⁸ "Survey Shows Union Actions on Rights Plan," *Chicago Tribune*, December 28, 1957, 2.

¹⁰⁹ "Bias in Labor's Rank," *New York Times*, January 10, 1959, 16.

¹¹⁰ James E. Youngdahl, "Unions and Segregation," *New Republic*, June 9, 1956, 14.

¹¹¹ A. H. Raskin, "A.F.L.-C.I.O. Faces 'Jim Crow' Fight," *New York Times*, Sept. 20, 1959, 1.

¹¹² August Meier, "Negro Protest Movements and Organizations," *Journal of Negro Education* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1963): 441.

of American unions and of the entire New Deal bargaining system began to precipitously decline.”¹¹³ Lichtenstein goes on to outline premises that created widespread problems for unions:

First, the recession of 1957-58, the deepest in two decades, demonstrated that postwar capitalism was hardly on automatic pilot. A self-governing equilibrium between capital and labor was not sufficient to make the economy function with fairness or efficiency. Second, the civil rights movement had begun to stir, which set a new and higher standard for those who claimed to speak for the underdog. Pluralism, industrial or otherwise, no longer seemed to describe social reality in the United States, especially when it justified oligarchic rule. And finally, the McClellan Committee hearings of 1957 and 1958 had a devastating impact on the moral standing of the entire trade-union world, belying labor’s claim that it constituted the most important and efficacious movement for democracy and social progress.¹¹⁴

Lichtenstein indicates that the weakness and fragmentation of unions would inevitably reduce their power. That simply meant that blacks, as union members, were in need more than ever. Given that labor-based strategies were under attack, it was rather odd for it to be part of *A Land Beyond the River*. Labor had inspired playwrights of the 1930s and 1940s, particularly Clifford Odets and Elmer Rice; it can only be surmised that Mitchell was inspired by those two playwrights. Elmer Rice was certainly concerned and active with civil rights issues. (More about Rice in chapter 2.)

Concurrent with this collaboration between unions and civil rights organizations, the theatre and the movie industry were developing amicable relationships with unions. The Greenwich Mews Theatre was unquestionably a big supporter of unions and believed in serving their goals. Part of its strategy to keep its attendance rate high was to target unions. Howard makes this clear:

¹¹³ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 141.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

We marketed the play to civil rights organizations and unions. I do remember that the Transport Workers came. The UAW and the NAACP came. It was marketed as a play they had to see—that it was about their membership. I am not too helpful about what particular persons from what organizations, but I do know that they came and brought people. The theatre definitely reached out to civil rights organizations and unions.¹¹⁵

Robert Graham Brown, who originated the role of Layne in the 1957 production and acted in many of the benefit performances, confirmed that they had a great deal of support from unions and civil rights organizations.¹¹⁶

Approximately one year after Mitchell's drama opened, Stella Holt entered an "agreement with District 65, Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, which claims 35,000 members." Under the agreement, "the theatre, which conducted workshops, classes, and lectures on the theatre for members of the union, received financial assistance."¹¹⁷ The union in return would, according to its president, David Livingston, benefit from the marriage by not only allowing the union to serve its membership and the community at large but also to "take our place in the world of creative endeavor."¹¹⁸

Mitchell was also sympathetic and committed to union issues. In his drama, he introduces a peripheral storyline that concerns the union. Ben, Laura's boyfriend and a marginal character, connects his father to the union:

BEN

My father was something. When they chased him from around here for trying to start a union, his picture was in every sheriff's office within a hundred-mile radius. *(He laughs at this, but it becomes a bitter laugh. Laura senses this, glances at him, then looks away.)*

(A Land Beyond the River, 311)

¹¹⁵ Howard, interview.

¹¹⁶ Robert Graham Brown, interview with author (September 16, 2005).

¹¹⁷ Calta, "Union Will Assist," 40.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

This information neither moves the drama forward nor has a stake in the current action. Mitchell even allows Ben to bring up the topic once again:

BEN

Laura, I stood there today and heard two judges say segregation is legal! It was legal for a mob to chase my father out of the South for trying to organize a union! Legal for him to live in a cold North he never understood! Legal for him to die heartbroken, and my mother to go die worrying over him! Legal!

(A Land Beyond the River, 385)

Here is evidence that Ben's father suffered greatly because of his commitment to the union and its causes; it resonates with the people who are fighting for equality. They, too, have suffered and been mistreated.

Mitchell's decision to incorporate the union storyline, despite the oddness in its timing, appeared to be a sagacious move; it inevitably played a role in the drama's lengthy run. A press account stated, "over 100 organizations have made more than 4000 reservations for Lofton Mitchell's *A Land Beyond the River*."¹¹⁹

Granted, one of the essential functions of the theatre is to find methods to sell a play. Selling Mitchell's play to unions was a less obvious choice than to sell the play to schools and civil rights organizations. Nevertheless, it turned out to be a fortunate choice for everyone involved. *A Land Beyond the River* became a popular fund-raising vehicle for activist and charitable organizations, including the NAACP, the United Jewish Appeal, and the National Committee for Rural Schools. Most important, it was not a civil rights organization that sponsored the touring production of the play, it was a union, the United Automobile Workers (UAW). In attendance at one of their sold-out benefit performances was National Director of Education Walter Reuther, who made the decision to tour *A Land Beyond the River* to "various camps and installations

¹¹⁹ Press Information, Lofton Mitchell file, Lincoln Center Library, New York.

supervised by the UAW.”¹²⁰ In addition to those, the drama toured schools and interracial organizations and did many benefit parties and performances. Mitchell stated that he was “gratified that two United Automobile Workers theatre parties raised \$11,000, which was used to buy a harvesting combine for the people of Clarendon County.”¹²¹

Finally, there is another central historical link of *A Land Beyond the River* to the union. The DeLaine’s saga connection to the union comes about initially through Ossie Davis’s *The People of Clarendon County*.¹²² Davis, who had written short sketches for Local 1199, was asked to write a sketch for their annual Negro Week Celebration, circa 1954/1955. Davis decided to write a short scene dramatizing DeLaine’s ordeal that led to *Briggs v. Elliott* (Clarendon County).¹²³ Davis, his wife, Ruby Dee, and another actor, possibly Sidney Poitier, successfully performed *The People of Clarendon County*, a fourteen-page sketch, at Local 1199’s event.¹²⁴

Davis’s *The People of Clarendon County* inspired Mitchell’s *A Land Beyond the River*. After attending the performance, Mitchell encouraged Davis to write a longer play about the Clarendon County incident. “Davis, however, was so busy with his acting that he had little time for writing, and offered Mitchell free rein to develop the play himself.”¹²⁵ Mitchell, therefore, decided to contact Joseph DeLaine, who Davis knew through an aunt who lived in Lake City, South Carolina. This aunt assisted DeLaine’s wife, who lived with her when DeLaine was run

¹²⁰ Press Information, Loftin Mitchell file.

¹²¹ Paul Nadler, “American Theatre and the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1965” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1995), 209. [Nadler states that Mitchell provided him with this interview, 7 October 1994.]

¹²² Ossie Davis, *The People of Clarendon County*, Ossie Davis Collection, Box 3, Folder 10, Schomburg Library, New York.

¹²³ Ossie Davis, interview with author (November 23, 2004).

¹²⁴ [It has been reported that Sidney Poitier did read a part in the sketch for the union’s performance. His name is on the script as one of the characters in the three-character playlet; however, during my interview, Davis said he could not remember if it was Poitier or another actor. When I first started working on this project, Davis’s play was only in script form. It has since been published. See Ossie Davis, *The People of Clarendon County*, ed. Alice Bernstein (Chicago: Third World Press, 2007).]

¹²⁵ Nadler, “American Theatre,” 205.

out of town.¹²⁶ Mitchell sat down with DeLaine at a restaurant in Harlem and *A Land Beyond the River* was the result of that meeting.

Conclusion: *A Land Beyond the River* and Its Linkage to the Civil Rights Movement

In *The Theory and Technique of Playwriting*, John Howard Lawson argues, “the audience is the ultimate necessity which gives the playwright’s work its purpose and meaning.” He stresses that the dramatist “tries to persuade the audience to share his intense feeling in regard to the significance of the action.”¹²⁷ Erwin Piscator, whose own work influenced the type of political theatre this theatre encourages, argues, “There is no theatre without an audience.”¹²⁸ Mitchell wanted his audiences to feel and understand the plight of those “simple human beings” he had come to know through DeLaine.

After reading your critic’s review of “A Land Beyond the River” at the Greenwich Mews Theatre we decided to see the play. We want to thank your critic for being instrumental in our spending a thrilling evening in the theatre. This play moved us much more deeply than many a so-called “illustrious” work of art we have seen on Broadway.

Louis J. Kane, M.D.
New York¹²⁹

A Land Beyond the River, which embodies a social, political, and historical awareness, communicates a moment in history when public school education was undergoing a change. A theatre experience helps educate audience members how to think and feel about various issues. Moving an individual from social awareness to social action is what many of the plays of the civil rights era sought to do. Many of these plays¹³⁰ were about educating, politicizing, and empowering African Americans--in essence, dealing with their liberation. Theorist Augusto

¹²⁶ Information from an interview with Joseph DeLaine’s son.

¹²⁷ John Howard Lawson, *The Theory and Technique of Playwriting* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 299.

¹²⁸ Erwin Piscator, “Objective Acting,” in *Actors on Acting: The Theories, Techniques, and Practices of the Great Actors of All Times as Told in Their Own Words*, rev. ed., ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Crown, 1976), 302.

¹²⁹ Louis J. Kane, letter to the editor, *New York Times*, June 2, 1957, 117.

¹³⁰ Particularly, the plays discussed in this dissertation.

Boal (1931-2009) argues for the power of theatre as a weapon of liberation.¹³¹ *A Land Beyond the River* exemplifies dramas of the Civil Rights Movement era that relied on theatre as a weapon to educate, agitate, raise audience awareness, and encourage people to participate in political activism.

A Land Beyond the River fused the cultural and the political spheres, thereby establishing an environment that was receptive to an inspiring story that embodied social, political, and historical awareness. It was the first successful civil rights drama that used the cultural form of theatre to create interventions in public debates. *A Land Beyond the River* was perhaps one of the first plays (or certainly one of the earliest) by an African-American playwright to be the starting point for the careers of many African-American actors who later established themselves as major figures in the arts: theatre, television, and film.¹³² More important, *A Land Beyond the River* is the first successful play that tapped into and contextualized the verve and the spirit of an emerging Civil Rights Movement sentiment. Every aspect of the play was simultaneously overlapping and contributing to the collective activities and shared interests and ideas of civil rights leaders. It resonated with doctrines, events, and political circumstances of an emerging political formulation. This is not to argue that Mitchell created the prevailing circumstances; he

¹³¹ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. McBride and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), ix.

¹³² The ensemble cast included Robert Graham Brown (who represented Joseph DeLaine), Helen Martin, Richard Ward, Jacqueline Barnes, Fran Bennett, Clayton Corbin, Donald Julian, Diana Sands, Ted Butler, Albert Grant, Peggy Devello, Charles Griffin, Howard Weirum, Lionel Habas, George Lucas, and Eric Richmond. Replacements for cast members included Ivan Dixon, Fred Grossinger, Harold Scott, Douglas Turner, Lynn Hamilton, Helen Marsh, Roscoe Lee Browne, Isabell Sanford, James Alpe, Billy Read, and Will Lowrey Jr. Mitchell mentioned all of the names in his book because, as he stated, “not out of respect and gratitude, but also because they indicate the present makeup of the professional Negro theatre worker. In that listing you find veterans from the Rose McClendon Players, the Harlem Suitcase, the American Negro Theatre, the Harlem Showcase, the Committee for the Negro in the Arts, and various drama schools.” (Mitchell, *Black Drama*, 179) I listed the names for another reason, which is to call attention to the fact that an overwhelming number of the African-American actors from this production, after many years in the theatre, went on to have very impressive careers. Many became extremely successful in film and television. For example—I will mention only a few--Douglas Turner, later known as Douglas Turner Ward, acted in many plays and was one of the founders and then the artistic director of the Negro Ensemble Company. Ivan Dixon appeared in more than 50 movies and television series, including *Hogan's Heroes* from 1965-1970; Roscoe Lee Browne was in more than 100 movies and television series; and Isabell Sanford (1917-2004) appeared in more than 50 movies and television series and was the lead actress in *The Jeffersons* for ten years. She was also the first African-American woman to win an Emmy Award for Best Actress in a comedy series (1981).

was a cultural producer, a participant who was part of the strategy by offering his services. He played a role in the interpretive process that constituted the Movement. Mitchell corresponded with civil rights leaders about the play; and Joseph DeLaine, an “Integration Leader,”¹³³ was a guest speaker on many occasions with major civil rights leaders. Thus, by interweaving the cultural and political at the time he did, Mitchell became the first Civil Rights Movement poster child playwright. He was the first accepted African-American playwright on top of the wave for change.

Eric Bentley argues that theatre’s contribution to social change is small.¹³⁴ *A Land Beyond the River* evidently invested in the notion that theatre had the capacity to affect what was happening in society. What was significant about that investment was that it occurred during a time when theatre did matter in the realm of mass culture. Additionally, this was a crucial time of florescence for African-American dramatists. [Even Mitchell proclaimed this period of the Civil Rights Movement a second black Renaissance.]¹³⁵ The efficacy of theatre always pivots on the critical reception of the play. That for *A Land Beyond the River* was exceptional, beyond what anyone expected. Even if Bentley is right about the small change theatre makes, that small contribution sometimes gives a vital impetus to a process, as did *A Land Beyond the River*’s during this Civil Rights Era.

Thus, by situating education as the center of his play, Mitchell relied on a subject that he knew would not only arouse the spirit of African Americans but would fit into the cultural revolution that called for liberation, empowerment, and arts activism. It is reasonable to argue that *A Land Beyond the River* is the starting point for Civil Rights Movement dramas. It is the

¹³³ DeLaine among King and other leaders. Appendix 1, 269.

¹³⁴ Eric Bentley, “Bentley on Resistance” (Naturalism Revisited), *Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1968): 25.

¹³⁵ Mitchell, *Black Drama*, 182.

play in which politics and culture crossed boundaries and came together to mobilize audiences (supporters and participants) to experience an emerging politics that framed egalitarianism.

Beyond the political inspiration and popular enthusiasm *A Land Beyond the River* created for the ethos of the Civil Rights Movement, the play moved some citizens—as stated above—to put pen to paper to express how it affected their lives. The letter below links Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* to Mitchell's play. Both are formidable Civil Rights Movement dramas. Whereas Mitchell relies on education, Hansberry's play, which is the focus of the next chapter, relies on housing to advocate goals of the Civil Rights Movement.

I saw Lorraine Hansberry's beautiful play, "A Raisin in the Sun," the other weekday evening and noted with great satisfaction that it played to a full house. Perhaps the popular misconception that non-musical plays by and about Negroes cannot "succeed" on Broadway can now be laid to rest.

It would appear that Miss Hansberry's work has broken the backer barrier, and in view of this I would like to offer in nomination for Broadway production a play seen Off Broadway a couple of years ago—Loften Mitchell's spirited and moving "A Land Beyond the River."

Nat Pitt
New York¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Nat Pitt, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, April 5, 1959, X3.

Chapter Two:

Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*

Many politicized racial battles were fought during the twentieth century, ranging from those for equal education and employment to those for voting rights and housing. In *A Land Beyond the River*, Loften Mitchell used the theatre to explore the battle for education. This chapter relies on Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* to examine the housing issue and its connections to the Civil Rights Movement. Hansberry dramatized, articulated, and disseminated ideas about housing and its surrounding politics to create interventions into public debates.

Education dominated the equality battle until the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954. After the *Brown* decision, housing, the key factor blamed for interracial discord,¹³⁷ became the most “vital unfinished business” in race relations.¹³⁸ Stephen Grant Meyer argues, “The decade from 1949 to 1959 marked the era of the most significant upheaval in race housing.”¹³⁹ The year Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* reached Broadway (1959), Chicago was labeled “the most residentially segregated city in America,”¹⁴⁰ and had a reputation as the Birmingham of Northern cities. Setting her play in Chicago, a city that had the second largest black community in the United States, Hansberry furthered the civil rights housing battle by contextualizing integration while wrestling with the truth of a pervasive housing dilemma.

To comprehend fully Hansberry's exploration of Chicago's housing segregation, it is necessary to give the details about Chicago's exploitative segregated housing practices. Nationwide racial segregation--and its severe consequences--during the late 1950s and early 1960s was well documented.¹⁴¹ Chicago, however, a mythic city with a lore of romanticized

¹³⁷ “Housing Ills Blamed for Race Stress,” *Washington Post*, May 4, 1951, B3.

¹³⁸ Edward Ranzal, “Housing Target of Urban League,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1955, 39.

¹³⁹ Stephen Grant Meyer, *As Long As They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 115.

¹⁴⁰ “Rights Group Blasts Chicago Segregation,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, September 10, 1959, 23.

¹⁴¹ This is only a short list of books dealing with housing segregation during the period. Charles Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors: A Study of Prejudice in Housing* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955); O. D. Duncan and Beverly Duncan, *The Negro Population of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Davis McEntire, *Resistance and Race: Final and Comprehensive Report to the Commission on Race and Housing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Beverly Duncan and P. M. Hauser, *Housing a Metropolis—Chicago* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960); Nathan Glazer and Davis McEntire, *Studies in Housing*

gangsters and colorful and deeply corrupt politicians, had its own horrendous housing problems. What made Chicago's unique is the broad spectrum of complicity in segregation, ranging from that of civil rights leaders and civil rights organizations down to petty speculators. Beryl Satter researched the widespread collusion and revealed what profiteering speculators understood about their role; she writes:

Responsibility for their practices was shared by everyone who created the explosive market in black housing—from the Federal Housing Administration, redlining banks, and the Chicago Real Estate Board to the ordinary white Chicagoans who harassed black families who dared to move into their neighborhoods. This broad range of complicity enabled speculators to view themselves not as predators but as level-headed professionals who approached their profit-making activities with open eyes.¹⁴²

Satter's father, a lawyer in Chicago at the time, fought tenaciously to end the unethical, unscrupulous, and discriminatory practices of speculators by offering legal assistance to the poor, unsuspecting African Americans they ensnared.

The existence, extent, persistence, and deeply entrenched nature of Chicago's housing segregation, which fueled Hansberry's creative spark, were not unexplored creatively. Chicago's most stringent racial tension was attached to housing and Frank London Brown¹⁴³ had gained considerable critical acclaim with his first novel, *Trumbull Park* (1959), exploring what occurs when a black family moves out of the slums and into a new public housing development in Chicago's Trumbull Park. The novel explores the resistance and hostility of whites that was very real for Chicago. Alan Paton stated *Trumbull Park* was a novel that "will shame white

and *Minority Groups* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Stanley Lieberson, *Ethnic Patterns in American Cities* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1963); Karl E. Taeuber and Alma F. Taeuber, *Negroes in Cities: Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Change* (Chicago: Aldine, 1965).

¹⁴² Beryl Satter, *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt, 2009), 75.

¹⁴³ Brown not only wrote about Chicago's housing segregation, he also gave speeches on the issues. [see "Brown's Speech Slaps Housing," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 19, 1959, 4.]

Americans,”¹⁴⁴ while another critic wrote that it would enable “white folks to understand a little better what goes on in the minds of black folks.”¹⁴⁵ Critics also noted that Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* helped whites understand what was going on in the minds of blacks. While not relying on antagonism or protest, Hansberry and Brown invested in telling the truth about housing segregation. (More about Hansberry’s commitment to the ‘truth’ later.) Hansberry went directly to the housing problem by using a poor, decent, upstanding black family.

A Raisin in the Sun and Its Revolutionary Connection to the Civil Rights Movement

“Harlem: A Dream Deferred”

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like A Raisin in the Sun
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

--Langston Hughes

A Raisin in the Sun, which epitomizes the sentiment of Hughes’s poem, dramatizes the story of the Younger family, three generations consisting of five family members crowded into a three-room kitchenette apartment in Chicago: a tyrannical widow, her advanced-thinking daughter, a restless son and his pregnant wife, and their small son. In the drama, which is layered with humor and pathos, the initial conflict centers on a \$10,000 check that is due the widow from her late husband’s insurance policy. That insurance money binds the family to Hughes’s *A Dream Deferred*, providing an outlet for each member to dream beyond the realm of their

¹⁴⁴ Alan Paton, “Heroic Tale of Crusade for Human Rights,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 12, 1959, B1.

¹⁴⁵ R. L. Duffus, “Bigotry Also Moved In,” *New York Times*, April 12, 1959, BR41.

claustrophobic individual predicaments. A small house with a backyard garden qualifies as the widow's dream; the son's dream encompasses his opening a liquor store; the daughter masquerades as a doctor in her dream; and the son's wife simply dreams of a better living arrangement. Reality is never far away from dreams and often overtakes them, which is what occurs when the son loses the \$6,500 his mother had entrusted him with in a liquor-store swindle.

The return to the harsh verity of poverty in their claustrophobic living arrangement devastates the family. Their only hope out of a downward-spiraling predicament connects to the mother's dream; she had secretly used \$3,500 of the insurance money as a down payment on a small suburban house in a white neighborhood. Everything then turns on the drama's second major conflict: Will the duped son regain his reputable standing by not accepting an offer made by the chairman of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association (an organization representing whites) to buy back the house at a profit? In wanting to buy back the house, the association has its own agenda, which supports the premise that black families are better off when they remain in their own neighborhoods. The white character, Lindner, argues the association's case:

LINDNER

...you've got to admit that man, right or wrong, has the right to want to have the neighborhood he lives in a certain kind of way. And at the moment the overwhelming majority of our people out there feel that people get along better, take more of a common interest in the life of the community when they share a common background. I want you to believe me when I tell you that race prejudice simply doesn't enter into it. It is a matter of the people of Clybourne Park believing, rightly or wrongly, as I say, that for the happiness of all concerned that our Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities.¹⁴⁶

(*A Raisin in the Sun*, 51)

¹⁴⁶ All of the quotes from the play are from: Clinton F. Oliver and Stephanie Sills, eds., *Contemporary Black Drama: From "A Raisin in the Sun" to "No Place to Be Somebody"* (New York: Scribner, 1971).

If the son accepts the money to stay out of the white neighborhood, he concurs with this agenda of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association, affirming the separatism doctrine that advocates housing segregation is in accordance with the principles of American democracy.

Scholars have dealt with an array of issues in Hansberry's play: from the patriarchal assumption of power to matriarchal control; from how personal growth survives in intergenerational struggle to intrafamilial conflict; from how economic and racial inequities impact on individuals to what happens when the postponement of dreams invades lives; from the emergence of African pride to the proclaiming of African superiority; from the investment in Christianity to the temptations of common debauchery. Yet none of the issues has the thematic power or the universality of owning a home. While *A Raisin in the Sun* presents a multi-thematic portrait of issues connected to the black struggle, the dramaturgical focus here is to examine the enterprise of home ownership and the role it played in neighborhood integration.

William Branch cogently states, "It's perfectly natural to assert one's creative impulses drawing on the people, places and things that one comes into contact within his [her] own particular sector of life, and to respond emotionally and emphatically to the rituals and patterns of conduct within one's own society."¹⁴⁷ As is evident from *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry's creative and emotional "impulses" are incontestably linked to the issue of housing and home ownership.

The Historical Panoramic of Hansberry's Emotional Connection to Housing

Hansberry, like many artists shaped by their backgrounds and experiences, was candid in writing about what she knew: "It was necessary for me to write of people and situations I knew, I grew up with."¹⁴⁸ Those included the housing issues in Chicago, which left an indelible

¹⁴⁷ William Branch, "The Challenge of the Black Writer," *Black Scholar* 10, no. 10 (July/August 1979): 11.

¹⁴⁸ Cecil Smith, "Author Only Practicing: *Raisin in the Sun* Was an Accident," *Los Angeles Times*, October 4, 1959, 24.

impression on her. “I think housing is so important I wrote a play about it,”¹⁴⁹ Hansberry acknowledged. Lloyd Richards, the original director of *A Raisin in the Sun*, confirmed that the drama was about housing:

She was absolutely making a statement about housing. In the very first draft of the play, she dealt with a black family moving into a white neighborhood. That is what she intended to write about and that is what she wrote about. She was influenced by the fact that people brought to her attention that within that struggle there was also another struggle that was meaningful, and that was the struggle of Walter Lee Younger defining his manhood, and that emerged beyond the initial impulse to write a play dealing with housing.¹⁵⁰

Judith Smith notes that Hansberry’s interests in housing encouraged her, while working at *Freedom* (the magazine founded by Paul Robeson), to write about tenants organizing and fighting evictions in Chicago and New York. Smith goes further to state that Hansberry, among other writers at *Freedom*,

linked the housing crisis to the increase of military spending; they called attention to the impact of planned slum clearance projects in destroying black, Puerto Rican, and ethnic working-class housing; they noted the discriminatory banking policies that prevented homeowners in Harlem from being able to borrow for repairs.¹⁵¹

The centrality of Hansberry’s link to housing started long before her association with *Freedom*. When Hansberry (1930-1965) was a child in the late 1930s, her father bought a house in a white neighborhood and took possession. For the next several years, he was in and out of the courts over the house, fighting a class action lawsuit to challenge the area’s racially exclusionary housing covenants. After losing in the Illinois courts, Hansberry’s father and his NAACP’s lawyers appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court:

¹⁴⁹ Diane Fisher, “Miss Hansberry and Bobby K.: Birthweight Low, Jobs Few, Death Comes Early,” *Village Voice*, June 16, 1963, 9.

¹⁵⁰ Lloyd Richards, interview with author (March 24, 2005).

¹⁵¹ Judith E. Smith, *Visions of Belonging: Family Stories, Popular Culture, and Postwar Democracy 1940-1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 309-310.

In November 1940 the Supreme Court ruled that Hansberry was entitled to have his case heard, but the court chose not to rule on the validity of the covenant itself. Although the court gave the Hansberrys a victory that included returning their house, the precedent established in *Hansberry v. Lee* dealt primarily with defining the parameters of a class action in a property case.¹⁵²

Hansberry's father won a symbolic victory from the Supreme Court in *Hansberry v. Lee*, a case that Hansberry mentioned in many interviews: "As early as I can remember my folks fought the restricted covenants that kept Negroes out of decent homes."¹⁵³ In another of her interviews, she detailed the harsh reality of her family's moving into the hostile white neighborhood:

Daddy bought a house when I was eight. My mother is a remarkable woman, with great courage. She sat in that house for eight months with us—while Daddy spent most of his time in Washington fighting his case—in what was, to put it mildly, a very hostile neighborhood. I was on the porch one day with my sister, swinging my legs, when a mob gathered. We went inside, and while we were in our living room, a brick came crashing through the window with such force it embedded itself in the opposite wall. I was the one the brick almost hit.¹⁵⁴

Michael Anderson, who is writing a biography of Hansberry, connects the brick-throwing episode to Hansberry's play; he discusses how a safe home for the Youngers was important for Hansberry:

In her first and greatest play, Hansberry took the situation that she lived in and transposed it to a milieu that she did not have. The family in that play is obviously a working-class family, unlike hers, and is not moving for a principled reason. They are moving out of human necessity, but the play talks very much about the desire, the necessity, the need of the people to have safe, healthy environments in which to grow and prosper. This is something Hansberry knew quite well, and obviously it was quite important to her.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Ibid., 287.

¹⁵³ Nan Robertson, "Dramatist Against Odds," *New York Times*, March 8, 1959, X3.

¹⁵⁴ E. B. White, "Talk of the Town" [Interview with Lorraine Hansberry], *New Yorker*, May 9, 1959, 35.

¹⁵⁵ Michael Anderson, interview with author (October 28, 2006). [Anderson, who was giving a paper in New York at the conference *James and Esther Jackson, the American Left, and the Origins of the Modern Civil Rights Movement: A New York University Symposium*, talked with me briefly prior to presenting his paper, *Lorraine Hansberry at Freedom*.]

The brick-through-the-window incident is a direct link to Hansberry's concerns about housing--a concern that preceded *A Raisin in the Sun* and stayed with her long after the play's success.

Living with her white husband (Robert Nemiroff) in Greenwich Village, Hansberry registered her strong feelings about the treatment of blacks in the area, targeting the real estate agents. "They'll make one excuse or another, but a Negro just can't get an apartment."¹⁵⁶ Hansberry's courage and commitment to oppose the ghetto inspires respect. While in the hospital and only months away from her death, she left one night to give a speech, returning to the hospital immediately afterwards. In the speech, she highlighted the key issues in *A Land Beyond the River* (education) and *A Raisin in the Sun* (housing) and castigated the essence of the ghetto: "The ghetto itself was and is maintained, not to give education but to withhold as much as possible, just as the ghetto exists not to give people homes but to keep them out of as much decent housing as possible."¹⁵⁷ This point is consistently supported in Beryl Satter's *Family Properties: Race, Real Estate, and the Exploitation of Black Urban America*.

Hansberry's rage against the ghetto experience is found throughout *A Raisin in the Sun*. One critic commented on this:

Inherent in *A Raisin in the Sun* is the problem of ghetto life. The tensions and frustrations of life in a Negro ghetto are revealed in the efforts of every member of the Younger family to achieve a better life.¹⁵⁸

Before the widow lets go of her dream about how best to use the insurance money, Hansberry's revelatory stage directions provide the crude reality of the ghetto existence for the Youngers, who live in a poorly lighted, cramped, and overcrowded apartment with a bathroom in the hallway that must be shared with other tenants. Hansberry's restricted space in *A Raisin in the*

¹⁵⁶ Fisher, "Miss Hansberry and Bobby K.," 9.

¹⁵⁷ Lorraine Hansberry, "The Scars of the Ghetto," *Monthly Review* 16, no. 10 (February 1965): 590. [Hansberry made the speech in May 1964. She died in January 1965. The speech was published posthumously in February 1965, under the title provided by *Monthly Review*.]

¹⁵⁸ William Patterson, "A Raisin in the Sun," *Mainstream* 12, no. 5 (1959): 49.

Sun made sure that audiences knew the Youngers were well acquainted with the housing tribulations of ghetto segregation.

Literature of the ghetto existence emphasizes with harsh indictments the political, social, and cultural ills of the living conditions. Hansberry rendered the reality of a racialized space that placed physical constraints on the Youngers, revealing the racist conditions of living in the ghetto. The Youngers were plagued with the pathology of the ghetto: poor living conditions, danger in the streets, crime, insufficient money, and a claustrophobic space—overcrowdedness. Robert Trotter, who suggests that ample evidence supports that crowding contributes to social problems and crime, argues, “Arousal, stress, anxiety and frustration seem to be among the important results of crowding that can lead to personal and social degeneration. One thing that can sometimes lead to stress or anxiety, for instance, is infringement on personal space.”¹⁵⁹ The Youngers actually had no personal space. Hansberry indicates that the grandmother and her daughter sleep in the bedroom. The husband and wife share a small room that “was probably a breakfast room or something.” Their son sleeps in the living room. The family can only cook in the kitchen; they eat in the living room. And, as stated, they share a bathroom in the hallway with other tenants. There is only one small window in the apartment, which is located in the kitchen. Thus, when Walter says to his wife (Ruth): “You tired, ain’t you? Tired of everything. Me, the boy, the way we live—this beat up hole—everything. Ain’t you?” audiences understand the legitimacy in his sentiment.

Huey Newton, one of the founders of the Black Panther party, reveals the aftereffects of a ghetto living arrangement:

I slept in the kitchen. The memory returns often. Whenever I think of people crowded into a small living space, I always see a child sleeping in the kitchen and feeling upset about it; everybody

¹⁵⁹ Robert J. Trotter, “Cities, Crowding & Crime,” *Science News* 106, no. 18 (November 2, 1974): 282.

knows that the kitchen is not supposed to be a bedroom. That is all we had, however. I still burn with the sense of unfairness I felt every night as I crawled into the cot near the icebox.¹⁶⁰

There is ample evidence in *A Raisin in the Sun* to reveal that the ghetto was not only an agent for substandard dwelling arrangements but also for myriad social problems. This makes it easy to sympathize with the family wanting out of their living predicament.

Lena, the widow, finds comfort in sharing a dream that releases her from the ghetto:

LENA

Been thinking that we maybe could meet the notes on a little old two-story somewhere with a yard where Travis could play in the summertime—if we use part of the insurance for a down payment and everybody kind of pitch in.

(*A Raisin in the Sun*, 50)

Lena's initiative to purchase a house was not stimulated only because she has the insurance money. Lena and her family had been trapped in the ghetto existence for many years. The insurance money made it possible for them to see a way out. The initial notion to purchase a house existed many years before when she and her husband moved into the now "rat trap" of an apartment:

LENA

...I remember just as well the day me and Big Walter moved in here. Hadn't been married but two weeks and wasn't planning on living here no more than a year.

(She shakes her head at the dissolved dream.)

We was going to set away, little by little, don't you know, and buy a little place out in Morgan Park. We had even picked out the house.

(Chuckling a little. Ruth holds at sink.)

Looks right dumpy today. But Lord, child, you should know all the dreams I had 'bout buying that house and fixing it up and making me a little garden in the back—

(She waits and stops smiling.)

And didn't none of it happen.

(*A Raisin in the Sun*, 51)

¹⁶⁰ Huey Newton, *Revolutionary Suicide* (New York: Ballantine, 1973), 14-15.

Lena's joy at moving to a house is equaled by that of Ruth, her daughter-in-law, who laments when she thinks the possibility of moving is not assured,

RUTH

...I'll work twenty hours a day in all the kitchens in Chicago—I'll strap my baby on my back if I have to and scrub all the floors in America and wash all the sheets in America if I have to—but we got to move—we got to get out of here.

(*A Raisin in the Sun*, 112)

Ruth's desperation ultimately turns into exuberance when the family moves, leaving its suffocating neighborhood and advancing the notion of integration by moving into a comfortable new home in a white neighborhood. There is a celebration of the family's triumph over the ghetto existence that has led to upward mobility into a new home.

A caution flag goes up here to warn not to place too much emphasis on the white neighborhood idea. Margaret Wilkerson and Elaine Tyler May stress that the white neighborhood is not central to Hansberry's strategy. To live with dignity and to subscribe to the notion of ownership as in the American Dream takes precedence over the importance of the white neighborhood. While Wilkerson argues:

It was not intended to be a play about a family that hates themselves, and hates their blackness, or that wanted to become white, to move away. It was based on the notion of what is the American Dream. That is, if you can afford it, you should be able to live where you can afford to do so. As the family said, they wanted this opportunity to live in this house. It is the house they wanted. It is not so much the [white] neighborhood as it is the house.¹⁶¹

May argues that Hansberry “articulated with great eloquence the postwar dream of a home in the suburbs, not to assimilate into white America but to live as a black family with dignity,

¹⁶¹ Margaret Wilkerson, interview with author (May 15, 2006).

independence, and comfort.¹⁶² Helene Keyssar also found validity in the argument that *A Raisin in the Sun* is a dramatization of a “family in pursuit of the American Dream.”¹⁶³ Harold Cruse, Hansberry’s most strident black critic, did acknowledge the American Dream motif in the drama he called a glorified soap opera:

What obviously elated the drama critics was the very relieving discovery that, what the publicity buildup actually heralded was not the arrival of belligerent forces across the color line to settle some long-standing racial accounts on stage, but a good old-fashioned, homespun saga of some good working-class folk in pursuit of the American Dream.¹⁶⁴

A legal scholar also concurs that the Youngers’ pursuit of the house was tied to the American Dream, insisting that “Hansberry’s play enjoyed success, in part, because it captured poignantly a longing that members of all racial and ethnic groups have felt to better their living conditions, to experience the *American Dream*.”¹⁶⁵

It is superfluous to argue the validity of Hansberry’s preference for either a black or white neighborhood, particularly when considering the undeniability of Hansberry’s social vision, which promotes racial inclusiveness. More central to Hansberry’s preoccupation was the social equality of housing than was the racial makeup of the neighborhood. She evinces as much when she states, “If there is any ‘message’ in my play, it is simply this: ghettoization of any people, black or white, is lousy and sickening and I tried to say it the best way I could.”¹⁶⁶ She alludes to the Youngers, who live the ghettoized existence. In a letter to an audience member who challenges her on this issue, Hansberry goes further to state why blacks should divorce

¹⁶² Elaine Tyler May, “Ambivalent Dreams: Women and the Home after World War II,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 152.

¹⁶³ Helene Keyssar, *The Curtain and the Veil* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1981), 115.

¹⁶⁴ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (New York: William Morrow, 1967), 277-278.

¹⁶⁵ Drew S. Days III, “Rethinking the Integrative Ideal: Housing,” *McGeorge Law Review* [33 McGeorge L. Rev. 459], 2000, 49.

¹⁶⁶ Ted Poston, “We Have so much to Say,” *New York Post*, Sunday Magazine, March 22, 1959, M2.

themselves from ghettos: “We must come out of the ghettos of America, because the ghettos are killing us; not only our dreams, as Mama says, but our very bodies.”¹⁶⁷

The politicalization of the housing issue also affected members of the cast. Claudia McNeil, perhaps taking a cue from Lena, the role she played in the drama, stated on the NAACP’s fiftieth birthday that the organization still had plenty of work to do. She commented on the housing situation, “There are Negro and minority families still trying to find decent housing in non-ghetto neighborhoods.”¹⁶⁸

Wilkerson insists that Hansberry “could not have picked a more fundamental subject than housing.”¹⁶⁹ This premise is not based solely on Hansberry’s personal predisposition because of her family’s housing travails. One essential reason for her focus was its connection to civil rights organizations; however, the most vital *raison d’être* for Hansberry’s housing concern was simply that of timing—just as the time had arrived to challenge separate-but-equal education, the time had arrived to challenge the ideology of separate-but-equal housing.

Hansberry’s Challenge to Separate-but-Equal Housing

What ignited Hansberry’s creative impulse to go forward and write *A Raisin in the Sun* was a question she asked herself: “Wouldn’t it be interesting to take a Negro family that moves into a house in a white neighborhood.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, the question inspired Hansberry to present the timely issue of separate-but-equal housing to theatregoers. Central to the timing: it validates that Hansberry had great political instincts, which allowed her to tap into an emerging political consciousness.

¹⁶⁷ Lorraine Hansberry to Pauline Oehler (March 8, 1959). Appendix 2, 270.

¹⁶⁸ Speech by Claudia McNeil. Appendix 3, 271.

¹⁶⁹ Wilkerson, interview.

¹⁷⁰ Gilbert Millstein, “Ten Playwrights Tell How It All Starts,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1959, SM63.

Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, expressed the same emerging political consciousness in 1959, several weeks before Hansberry's drama opened on Broadway, stating that "discrimination in housing, then, is the final barrier to a nationwide emergence of a wholesome and democratic way of life in America."¹⁷¹ One critic was puzzled by the audience's hospitable reception, which he thought was rather hypocritical:

I fully believe that the audience attending the performance I saw with my wife was genuinely moved by what it saw and heard that evening. I seriously question if many in that audience saw any discrepancy between their emotional partisanship for a Negro family that can, in the best sense of the word, be called heroic and the fact that most of them would return to homes in apartment houses that, albeit more "subtly," "in a more civilized fashion," are as strictly segregated as streetcars in the South. But there was something about the applause of this predominantly white audience at the final curtain that struck me as profoundly guilty and of uneasy conscience. And I could not join in it, however deeply I admired—no, loved—this play, because I knew it would be hypocritical of me to give palm-service to a democratic ideal that, living in a development I know beyond question would exclude Negroes, I personally am insufficiently rigorous to have held fast to, implacably and unconditionally, in my own way of life.¹⁷²

What the critic missed was that the audience was merely acknowledging the emerging political consciousness that Hansberry had engaged. Historian and editor Lerone Bennett Jr. spoke accurately of the timing and Hansberry's importance:

...the timing was right—in saying that I don't mean to take anything away from Lorraine Hansberry. But the timing was perfect. Remember, this was 1959, five years after the Supreme Court decision on school desegregation, four years after Montgomery, the eve of the sit-ins. The time was ripe for Lorraine Hansberry. She was a kind of herald, a person announcing the coming of something. It was in the air, I think, and whites felt it as well as blacks.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on Housing Hearing, held in New York, February 3, 1959, Afternoon Session, 332.

¹⁷² John Hastings, "A Raisin in the Sun: White Guilt or Northern Hypocrisy," *Village Voice*, July 29, 1959, 16.

¹⁷³ Lerone Bennett Jr. and Margaret G. Burroughs, "A Lorraine Hansberry Rap," *Freedomways: A Quarterly Review of the Freedom Movement* 19, no. 4 (1979): 229.

Eleanor Roosevelt, who was not alone in comprehending that the timing was apt to challenge separate-but-equal housing, wrote in her column, “We cannot eliminate segregation in jobs, education or churches until we eliminate segregation in houses.”¹⁷⁴ Another author argued, “Housing discrimination is the many-headed hydra which guards the crumbling bastions of prejudice and racism. Slay this monster, and the rest will fall of its own weight.”¹⁷⁵ Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, one of the commissioners of the hearings before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Housing) supports the idea of housing as being the most vital issue by stating:

To the extent that racial discrimination in housing exists in our midst, the progress that has been made in other problems, such as the protection of voting rights or the desegregation of public schools, will be in jeopardy, may indeed even create greater problems, for crowded racial slums threaten to turn our schools into blackboard jungles and to form a breeding ground for political demagoguery that can make a mockery of the right to vote.¹⁷⁶

By battling the ignorance surrounding the housing issue, Hansberry attempted to take a social problem out of the abstract and place it in front of an audience. She made people think about what they already knew—that black ghettos were overcrowded, that conditions in them were appalling, and that many of the social ills that affected black lives were connected to ghettos. Thus, *A Raisin in the Sun* embodied a social, political, and historical awareness of housing.

Studies during the 1950s confirmed what those of the 1930s and 1940s had revealed—that black housing, in every part of the country, and on every income level, was substandard, overcrowded, and generally inferior.¹⁷⁷ Hansberry specifically targets the characteristic of overcrowding and she broaches the issue of blacks getting less for their money when purchasing

¹⁷⁴ Harry S. Ashmore, *Civil Rights and Wrongs: A Memoir of Race and Politics, 1944-1996* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 240.

¹⁷⁵ Frank S. Horne, “Segregation in Suburbia,” *Interracial Review* 30, no. 9 (1957): 150. [Dr. Frank Horne was executive director of the New York City Commission on Intergroup Relations.]

¹⁷⁶ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on Housing Hearing, held in New York, February 2, 1959, Morning Session, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Isaac N. Groner and David M. Helfeld, “Race Discrimination in Housing (1911-47),” *Yale Law Journal* 57 (January 1948): 426.

homes, particularly in black communities. After surprising her family with the news she had purchased a house in a white neighborhood, Mama tells them why:

LENA

Them houses they put up for colored in them areas way out all seem to cost twice as much money as other houses. I did the best I could.

(*A Raisin in the Sun*, 86)

Jackie Robinson confirmed as much in his testimony at the hearing before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Housing). Responding to the question of whether it was true that “a dollar in the hand of a nonwhite person will only buy half as much housing as a dollar in the hand of a white person,” Robinson stated, “I have found that this is generally true and the housing that the nonwhite person is able to buy in most cases does not live up to the standards even though they pay a higher price for it or even in the rentals.”¹⁷⁸ This disparity was still true in the late 1960s. Whitney Young Jr., who served as executive director of the National Urban League and served on Lyndon B. Johnson’s President’s Commission on Urban Housing, reported, “Negro families, of whatever income level, pay one-third more for a given standard of housing than do white.”¹⁷⁹

As argued previously, Hansberry drew on her own reservoir of experience to produce her integrative ideal-housing drama. Hansberry borrows from authentic accounts; she situates the drama in the realities of Chicago. For example, a retired Chicago alderman (speaking specifically to the Clybourne Park Improvement Association and the character of Lindner), who discussed the small, cramped, and cockroach-filled dwellings available to blacks in Chicago during the time of Hansberry’s drama, confirmed that whenever a black family was successful in purchasing a house outside the Black Belt of Chicago, “Someone would typically try to buy the house from them to keep them out of the neighborhood. There would often be threats and

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on Housing Hearing, held in New York, February 3, 1959, Morning Session, 271.

¹⁷⁹ Whitney M. Young, *Beyond Racism: Building an Open Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 29.

sometimes worse.” The alderman, Leon Despres, connects this practice to Hansberry’s drama; “that was the case in *A Raisin in the Sun* when a representative from what was ironically referred to as the welcoming committee of the neighborhood improvement association approached the Youngers with an offer to buy their house at a price greater than they paid.”¹⁸⁰

Hansberry, by dramatizing the segregated housing problem, articulated the housing issue of that era and offered a counternarrative that could aid in the remedy of the problem. White Americans were vehement in protecting their racially homogeneous neighborhoods; Hansberry’s play was the example to counter those segregated neighborhoods. What makes *A Raisin in the Sun* not only the quintessential civil rights play but also the most revolutionary play of that time is its accomplishment. Without aggrandizing itself, the play found a way to ameliorate the tension that white homeowners had about blacks moving into their neighborhood. It made an inflammatory issue palpable to a wide spectrum of Americans. This argument is not to put forth the notion that housing discrimination disappeared overnight because of *A Raisin in the Sun*; that is not the case. As Wilkerson insists, the housing problem is still with us.¹⁸¹ Hansberry realized the drastic measures required to change segregation in housing, and she did something to assist in bringing about the change. This steers the conversation back to a topic alluded to earlier, Hansberry’s reliance on the truth. In a letter to her mother before the play opened on Broadway, Hansberry wrote about what the drama would tell:

It is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are—and just as mixed up—but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks, people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what, after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Robert S. Graettinger, “*A Raisin in the Sun* as Commentary on *Hansberry v. Lee*,” *CBA Record* (Chicago Bar Association) 17, no. 5 (June/July 2003): 33.

¹⁸¹ Wilkerson, interview,

¹⁸² Lorraine Hansberry, Correspondence and Personal Papers [letter to her mother, January 19, 1959], Box 2, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. Appendix 4, 272-274.

The *Truth* that Hansberry was after is not insignificant. It is arguably the highest manifestation of dramaturgical craftsmanship. Brander Matthews, who had a “profane love” for the theatre, claimed that truth was the determinative value of drama.¹⁸³ In her reliance on truth, Hansberry seamed fiction and truth together convincingly while engaging the well-known historical problem of the housing terrain.

Truth, the Black Voice, and Poststructuralists

Conceptually and intellectually, Hansberry’s racial sensibility connected to her inherited historical politics. When Hansberry declared that she operated under the premise that honored truth, this was no insignificant announcement. By doing such, Hansberry contextualized race and its connecting intricacies while expressing a political representation to define her claim(s) in “human terms,” asserting that there was a direct relationship between black lives and truthful black literature. In 1957, Richard Wright proclaimed:

...the Negro, as he learns to stand on his own feet and express himself not in purely racial, but human terms, will launch criticism upon his native land which made him feel a sense of estrangement that he never wanted. This new attitude could have a healthy effect upon the culture of the United States. At long last, maybe a merging of Negro expression with American expression will take place.¹⁸⁴

Receiving nourishment from Wright’s pronouncement, Hansberry was not only “standing on her own,” and offering literature that would have a “healthy effect upon the culture of the United States,” she provides her own prescription for sustenance of her people while offering resistance to the control, manipulation, absence, or silencing of her voice.

¹⁸³ Jack E. Bender, “Brander Matthews: Critic of the Theatre,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 12, no. 3 (October 1960): 173.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Wright, “The Literature of the Negro in the United States,” in *White Man, Listen!* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1964), 149.

Ironically, approximately a decade after Hansberry's critical stance for the black voice in literature, a theory of literary and political significance arrived and was institutionalized, disseminated, and promoted with alacrity and force in the American academy. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," was the title of an influential lecture that Jacques Derrida gave at Johns Hopkins University in 1966; Roland Barthes's essay "The Death of the Author" (1968) was published and began to receive immediate attention and praise; and Michel Foucault's lecture "What Is an Author?" was presented to the Société Française de philosophie on February 22, 1969. By rejecting the notion of authorship, identity, and subjectivity, the three poststructuralists offered criticism that was a direct challenge to what Hansberry had posed. While the poststructuralists were challenging the hegemony of the Western white masculine tradition of literary constructions, they simultaneously attacked and resisted the authorization of a black voice, which was central to blacks at the time. Joyce Ann Joyce is one critic who opposed the poststructuralists, arguing, "the poststructuralist sensibility does not aptly apply to Black American literary works."¹⁸⁵ Furthering her attack on the poststructuralists, Joyce argues:

For the Black American—even the Black intellectual—to maintain that meaningful or real communication between human beings is impossible because we cannot know each other through language would be to erase or ignore the continuity embodied in Black American history. Pushed to its extreme, poststructuralist thinking perhaps helps to explain why it has become increasingly difficult for members of contemporary society to sustain commitments, to assume responsibility, to admit to a clear right and an obvious wrong.¹⁸⁶

Henry Louis Gates also opposed the poststructuralists, arguing:

¹⁸⁵ Joyce A. Joyce, "The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* 18 (Winter 1987): 341-342.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 342.

The classic critique of our attempts to reconstitute our own subjectivity, as women, as blacks, etc., is that of Jacques Derrida. "This is the risk. The effect of Law is to build a structure of the subject, and as soon as you say, 'Well, woman is a subject and this subject deserves equal rights,' and so on--then you are caught in the logic phallocentrism and you have rebuilt the empire of Law." To expressions such as this, made by a critic whose stand on sexism and racism has been exemplary, we must respond that the Western male subject has long been constituted historically for himself and in himself. And, while we readily accept, acknowledge, and partake of the critique of *this* subject as transcendent, to deny us the process of exploring and reclaiming our subjectivity before we critique it is the critical version of the grandfather clause, the double privileging of the categories that happen to be preconstituted.¹⁸⁷

Barbara Christian spreads the boundary beyond blacks while opposing the poststructuralist:

The pervasiveness of this academic hegemony is an issue continually spoken about—but usually in hidden groups, lest we, who are disturbed by it, appear ignorant to the reigning academic elite. Among the folk who speak in muted tones are people of color, feminists, radical critics, creative writers, who have struggled for much longer than a decade to make their voices, their various voices, heard, and for whom literature is not an occasion for discourse among critics but is necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better.¹⁸⁸

Joyce, Gates, Christian, and others, who opposed the poststructuralists, presented an answer to Foucault's question (*What difference does it make who is speaking?*); they were saying what Hansberry had ushered to the forefront, it makes all the difference who is speaking. Hansberry understood that her voice was significant and she wanted to write herself truthfully into history. This was what she was after when she wrote, "I am prepared to tell all America and the world about our people." Hansberry drew on the complex intersections of race, class, and gender when she refused to be marginalized or trivialized. Her decision to explore the predicament of

¹⁸⁷ Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Master's Pieces: On Canon Formation and the African-American Tradition," in *The Politics of Liberal Education*, ed. Darryl Gless (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 111.

¹⁸⁸ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Feminist Studies* 14 (Spring 1988): 69.

segregation in housing was prescient; it proved to be one of the keynote issues of the decade. By contextualizing *A Raisin in the Sun* in the ‘truth’ frame, Hansberry does not augment protest as much as she depicts characters that have experienced the crushing impact of housing racism. By tackling the issue of housing and being successful with it, Hansberry attached a vital importance to the dramatic heft of her play.

A Raisin in the Sun and Its Dramatic Heft

When *A Raisin in the Sun* opened on Broadway in March 1959 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, many critics were quick to note its numerous history-making aspects: the first time an African-American director (Lloyd Richards) directed a drama on Broadway; the first time the producers (Philip Rose and David Cogan) produced on Broadway; the first time the leading actor (Sidney Poitier) had a leading role on Broadway; and the first time a play by an African-American woman was produced on Broadway. Another salient factor rarely mentioned by critics was that *A Raisin in the Sun* landed on Broadway at a moment in history when the political impetus for integration was gaining in significance as a valid ideology. Timing and its connection to the housing issue was discussed earlier; yet another vital issue relating to timing deserves attention: i.e., audiences’ readiness to deal with the essence of integration. The critics generally overlooked the issue of integration; however, author and activist William L. Patterson did not ignore it in his 1959 review, noting that *A Raisin in the Sun* arrived on “Broadway at a moment when the struggle for Negro integration into American life in general has reached a critical point.”¹⁸⁹ Margaret Wilkerson validates the claim that the play came at an opportune juncture:

A Raisin in the Sun comes along when the larger population, particularly in the North, is saying, “I don’t understand what’s

¹⁸⁹ Patterson, “*A Raisin in the Sun*,” 47.

going on.” And this opens up a way for people outside of the black experience to enter into it and maybe get a handle on some of the frustrations that were present. The other aspect of this for me is Louis Peterson’s play *Take a Giant Step*, in which the family moves into an integrated neighborhood. The critics reviewed the play well and liked it, but it could not get an audience. I think that because of what happened during that period, from 1953 to 1959, audiences were ready to enter this play. They were ready to look at black people and try to understand what was going on. It was slightly different [from Peterson’s play], but it was a play about housing in a way since the family moved into an integrated neighborhood.¹⁹⁰ It was a very good play. Evidently, it didn’t capture an audience, a general audience, even though it captured the critics. I think the power of *A Raisin in the Sun* and its popularity is directly tied to the progress, the issues, and the questions raised by the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁹¹

In 1946, before *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Take a Giant Step* (another Broadway play) tackled the issue of housing, thereby integrating a white neighborhood, white playwright Maxine Wood’s *On Whitman Avenue*, starring Canada Lee, “challenged white audiences to confront their fears and stereotypes, and ultimately their own complicity in racial segregation.”¹⁹² The play examined the racial difficulties a black family encountered when it moved into an apartment in a white neighborhood. Thomas D. Pawley’s description of *On Whitman Avenue*’s black family is reminiscent of Hansberry’s family; he represents the “Bennetts as clean, decent people, the kind of family most Americans want for neighbors. They are intelligent, honest, and, except for Gramp, educated. They are good neighbors, but they are black. They are also proud people.”¹⁹³ *On Whitman Avenue* did not have the benefit of offering its dramatic subject at a timely juncture, as did *A Raisin in the Sun*.

¹⁹⁰ Louis Peterson’s *Take a Giant Step* opened to good reviews on Broadway at the Lyceum Theatre in September 1953. To support what Wilkerson suggests, one critic wrote in his review, “Mr. Peterson, a newcomer to the playwrights’ ranks, has as his protagonist Spencer Scott, a colored boy living in a white community. He must deal, therefore, not only with the usual adjustment of youth to the adult world, but with the added difficulty of not quite belonging to the society in which he lives.” [From *Wall Street Journal*, September 28, 1953, 8.]

¹⁹¹ Wilkerson, interview.

¹⁹² Martha Biondi, *To stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 118.

¹⁹³ Thomas D. Pawley, “Three Views of the Returning Black Veteran,” in Black Theatre Issue, *Black American Literature Forum* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 167.

Being of the moment indicates that *A Raisin in the Sun* resonated with the emergent values of a political culture of a particular time. In this context, integration was becoming a progressive ideology, which signaled the renegotiation of racial politics. One scholar wrote that the play “prophetically embodied the Afro-American spirit that was soon to engulf the nation in a historic movement for social change; it was also a catalyst for the emergence of a new movement in black theatre.”¹⁹⁴ Critics embraced it and simultaneously accepted Hansberry’s social-conscience politics of interracial coalition. Bruce McConachie notes that the drama served “the meliorative goals of the early Civil Rights Movement.”¹⁹⁵ Hansberry’s progressive politics embraced the ideology of integration. At a NAACP rally shortly after the New York opening of *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry advocated full integration of blacks into American life.¹⁹⁶

As stated earlier, the primary focus of this chapter is to examine the thematic concerns of housing and the nexus between civil rights organizations and Hansberry’s drama, contending that *A Raisin in the Sun* deserves its “Quintessential Civil Rights Play” eminence. Yet, this contention does not capture the full aesthetic and political scope of the racialized drama, which won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award over Archibald MacLeish’s *J.B.*, Eugene O’Neill’s *A Touch of the Poet*, and Tennessee Williams’s *Sweet Bird of Youth*.

Despite the fact that Hansberry did not win the Pulitzer¹⁹⁷ (many thought she should have), *A Raisin in the Sun* went on to become widely acknowledged among theatregoers and theatre scholars as a great American classic. Even Amiri Baraka, a harsh critic of the 1959 production, came to appreciate the drama. In 1986, he reversed his earlier disapproving commentary to say that Hansberry’s drama is a “great play.” He concluded by stating that the drama “though it

¹⁹⁴ Jean Carey Bond, “Lorraine Hansberry: To Reclaim Her Legacy,” *Freedomways* 19, no. 4 (1979): 183.

¹⁹⁵ Bruce McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947-1962* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), 195.

¹⁹⁶ “NAACP Opens Drive,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1959, 38.

¹⁹⁷ See letters from Pulitzer Prize committee. Appendixes 5 & 6, 275-279.

seems ‘conservative’ in form and content to the radical petite bourgeoisie, is the accurate telling and stunning vision of the real struggle. The concerns I once dismissed as ‘middle class’—of buying a house and moving into ‘white folks’ neighborhood—actually reflect the essence of black will to defeat segregation, discrimination and oppression.”¹⁹⁸ The heft was forever present in Hansberry’s drama; its dramatic weight started to materialize more as the play reached more audiences, and their appreciation substantially increased.

A Raisin in the Sun Wooing Its Audience

There is no theatre without an audience.¹⁹⁹ Fundamental to this apothegm is the premise that the audience has an impact on the play and vice versa, which was the case with *A Raisin in the Sun*. James Baldwin captures the importance of the black audience succinctly, writing: “I had never in my life seen so many black people in the theater. And the reason was that never before, in the entire history of the American theater, had so much of the truth of black people’s lives been seen on stage. Black people ignored the theater because the theater had always ignored them.”²⁰⁰ [It is interesting that Baldwin mentioned truth—the same truth that Hansberry sought.]

One way to measure the impact of a drama on the audience is by the emotional response of tears. Many have noted tears in abundance at performances of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Lloyd Richards talked about being surprised by the tears in audiences.²⁰¹ Sidney Poitier wrote, “The Barrymore Theatre was a place of magic that opening night. As the curtain fell at the end of the third act, the audience came to its feet in a standing ovation that brought tears to the eyes of our cast. That audience, many of them with tears streaming down their faces, stomped, howled, and

¹⁹⁸ Amiri Baraka, “*Raisin in the Sun*’s Enduring Passion,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 1986, F13.

¹⁹⁹ Piscator, “Objective Acting,” 302.

²⁰⁰ James Baldwin, “Sweet Lorraine,” introduction, in Robert Nemiroff, adaptor, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), x.

²⁰¹ Richards, interview.

screamed with joy.”²⁰² [Poitier, who played the protagonist in both the original Broadway production and the movie, did acknowledge that he cried at the movie.²⁰³] Hansberry even “wept at performance.”²⁰⁴ Two of the New York critics mentioned the need for handkerchiefs,²⁰⁵ and one stated in his lead paragraph, “The number of tears shed by presumably worldly firstnighters must have set a new record at the Ethel Barrymore last night.”²⁰⁶ Another critic unabashedly wrote:

...for the first time in what seems like a thousand years I was utterly swept up onto the stage among the actors and their drama; intermittently throughout the tears came smarting to my eyes, as to all other eyes around me in a packed house taut and fervent with response; and last night in the dark, as I relived the entire performance and saw again the great grey lion’s head of Claudia McNeil at the climax, saw Poitier’s fantastic beauty and freedom as an actor, saw Ruby Dee’s inviolable pushed-to-the-wall sincerity, I gave in and virtually cried like a baby with the joyous nourishing tears of catharsis.²⁰⁷

McConachie offers his perspective on the tear-shedding, reasoning that:

The spectacle of white audience members in tears over the tribulations of a black family was hardly new in the American theater, of course. The primary effect of this outpouring at the production of *Raisin* in 1959, as it had been for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* more than a hundred years before, was to awaken white spectators to the possibility of common human feeling across racial lines. Once again, white folks were surprised and heartened to discover that they could share in the emotional problems of a black family struggling for freedom.²⁰⁸

While there is no doubt difficulty in pinpointing the exact cause of the tears, whether guilt, catharsis, or something else, it is certain that *A Raisin in the Sun* accomplished two things. First,

²⁰² Sidney Poitier, *This Life* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 236.

²⁰³ Howard Thompson, “Focus on a Peregrinating Poitier,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1961, X9.

²⁰⁴ Robert Nemiroff, adaptor, *To Be Young, Gifted and Black: Lorraine Hansberry in Her Own Words* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 104.

²⁰⁵ John McClain, “Gives a Wonderful Emotional Evening,” *Journal American*, March 12, 1959, 345; and Robert Coleman, “*Raisin in Sun* Superior Play,” *Daily Mirror*, March 12, 1959, 347.

²⁰⁶ Frank Aston, “*Raisin in Sun* Is Moving Tale,” *New York World-Telegram*, March 12, 1959, 346.

²⁰⁷ Jerry Tallmer, “Welcome, Miss Hansberry,” *Village Voice*, March 25, 1959, 7.

²⁰⁸ McConachie, *American Theater*, 191.

it did what theatre is supposed to do, as was evident from a Philadelphia reviewer's astute comments: "If the true functions of drama are to stimulate, perhaps, harass the conscience, mourn defeat, cheer aspirations and sing to courage—and I believe they are—then Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* meets these obligations in fuller measure than any play we've seen this season."²⁰⁹ Second, the drama located and stimulated the nerve that is responsible for the transformation in the consciousness of an audience. What Hansberry had done was to explore an issue that everyone in the audience was aware of coming into the theatre. Blacks and whites knew the inequality in housing. When Hansberry advocated for equal housing, everyone knew the time for equal housing had arrived. Hansberry had invoked an issue of political importance. In dealing with the housing issue, Hansberry's insight and clarity attached an immediacy to the issue; her dramatic voice ushered her forward as a serious political agent—a serious black political artist.

Lorraine Hansberry: Political Power of an Artist

A Raisin in the Sun's overnight success garnered Hansberry the type of fame few artists, white or black, receive during a lifetime. She became an instant spokesperson and was provided frequent opportunities to speak and write about numerous crucial issues and problems that challenged blacks. She argued with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy about segregation, discrimination, and the increasing violence against blacks in the United States.²¹⁰ Nicholas Katzenbach, who did not attend the meeting, offered his valuable insights about the meeting:

I heard about it. We talked about it. Bobby was very broken up about that and very unhappy about it because, I think, he felt that he had stuck his neck out a great deal for civil rights, and suddenly he had this meeting and they did nothing but abuse his sincerity. They said he didn't know what he was talking about and so forth.

²⁰⁹ Henry Murdock, "Poitier in Timely Play on Trials of Negroes," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 27, 1959.

²¹⁰ Laymond Robinson, "Robert Kennedy Consults Negroes Here about North," *New York Times*, May 25, 1963, 1. [Also: James Baldwin, "Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit," *Freedomways* 19, no. 7 (1979): 269-272].

I think it is interesting, because in many ways, Bobby's attackers, who were blacks, were right. I don't know whether it was possible for any whites, at that time, to have the same feelings, the same emotions—everything in their minds and their bodies—that a black could have. Bobby would have analogized it as the *No Irish* signs in Boston. You know, the two weren't comparable. And I think that was offensive to the blacks. Although Bobby was trying to find something to explain that he did understand it, he probably didn't. I don't think any of us in the justice department, that even included Burke Marshall, who I admired tremendously, any of the whites in the justice department, could understand and feel the way southern blacks in particular, and all blacks in general, felt about segregation.²¹¹

Hansberry spoke her mind in a 1959 radio interview with Studs Terkel.²¹² She exhibited poise, courage, and intelligence on a nationally televised interview with Mike Wallace.²¹³ She argued with Norman Mailer in the pages of the *Village Voice*.²¹⁴ [The exchanges between Hansberry and Mailer captured the attention of LeRoi Jones (before the name change to Amiri Baraka) and he attempted to organize a debate in which Mailer and Hansberry would battle over their opposing views in a public arena. Jones made it clear that he thought their differences were “significant” enough to warrant a public forum.²¹⁵] She even argued with Otto Preminger on television over what she termed the “deplorable stereotypes” in his film *Porgy and Bess*. Sidney Poitier's starring in the film did not curtail her condemnation of it. She also castigated Preminger for what she considered his mistake:

We cannot afford the luxuries of mistakes of other people. So it is not a matter of being hostile to you, but on the other hand it's also a matter of never ceasing to try to get you to understand that your

²¹¹ Nicholas Katzenbach, interview with author (March 8, 2006). [For more on the meeting with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, see: Jackie Robinson, “Jim Baldwin and Bob Kennedy,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 8, 1963, 11.]

²¹² Studs Terkel, “Make New Sounds: A Conversation with Lorraine Hansberry,” *American Theatre* 1, no. 7 (November 1984): 5. [Excerpts from a radio program aired May 12, 1959].

²¹³ Steve R. Carter, “Commitment amid Complexity: Lorraine Hansberry's Life in Action,” *Melus* 7, no. 3 (1980): 39-53.

²¹⁴ See Norman Mailer, “Theatre: *The Blacks*,” *Village Voice*, May 11, 1961, and “Theatre: *The Blacks* (cont.),” *Village Voice*, May 18, 1961; Lorraine Hansberry's response, “Genet, Mailer, and the New Paternalism,” *Village Voice*, June 1, 1961; and Mailer's follow-up, “Mailer to Hansberry,” *Village Voice*, June 8, 1961.

²¹⁵ LeRoi Jones to Lorraine Hansberry. Appendixes 7 & 8, 280-282.

mistakes can be painful, even those which come from excellent intentions. We've had great wounds from excellent intentions.²¹⁶

Hansberry even found herself in arguments that had nothing to do with political changes. For instance, she argued with the critic Robert Brustein, who wanted her to change the title character's last name in her second play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, because of its coincidental connection to his last name.²¹⁷

Those activities and more supported one scholar's claim that the "commercial success and critical recognition gave Hansberry sudden visibility, authority as a writer, and legitimacy as a voice for change."²¹⁸ Hansberry invested extensively in this legitimacy to move beyond the sphere of cultural commentator and earn a place among the coterie of *American Scholars*, as defined by Ralph Waldo Emerson, honoring the tradition of those whose reliance on intellectual substance, gained from nature, books, and action, was used to advance human knowledge while maintaining the courage to unsettle the status quo. Paula Giddings was accurate when she insisted "Hansberry was the first black woman intellectual to become a national celebrity."²¹⁹ Hansberry advanced beyond the status of a celebrity. Eric Bentley, in his seminal book *The Playwright as Thinker*, argued that any dramatist who wished to become a great playwright had to be a *thinker*. With her first play, Hansberry entered that rare category of *thinker*.

A Raisin in the Sun made theatre history, overwhelmed theatre critics, and established Hansberry as an important new voice in the American theatre. Her political, social, and cultural influences are extensive. Hansberry's drama affirmed that a new critical consciousness was needed to understand the intricacies of the black experience. She relied neither on the political

²¹⁶ Eric Greene and Richard Slotkin, *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 14.

²¹⁷ Robert Brustein to Lorraine Hansberry and reply. Appendixes 9 & 10, 283-285.

²¹⁸ Smith, *Visions of Belonging*, 320.

²¹⁹ Paula Giddings, review of *Hansberry's Drama: Commitment Amid Complexity*, by Steven R. Carter, *New York Times Book Review*, March 31, 1991, 25.

system nor the legal system to register her grievance about housing but voiced her concern through the cultural apparatus of the theatre, Broadway.

The Nexus: Politicalization of Hansberry, Housing, and Civil Rights Organizations

There is little doubt that the modern Civil Rights Movement was one of the fundamental developments of the twentieth century in America. This was a remarkable time of expansive progress that advanced the political socialization that not only imbued African Americans with confidence in their artistic abilities to effect political change but, more important, led them to recognize and appreciate their cultural power. It was accordingly a phenomenal time of political activism for African-American artists, and outlets opened up for them to voice their protests as never before. One of the most important was the theatre. Theatre had always served as a crucial cultural outlet for the dissemination of political messages, yet this had not been true for African Americans. It was now a promising time for African Americans to connect to the theatre. During the Civil Rights Movement era, more than 600 African-American theatre companies sprang into existence.²²⁰

With *A Raisin in the Sun*, Hansberry not only voiced her protest against segregated housing to a wider audience, she supplied ammunition to those who believed that the worth of an artist is measured in his/her commitment and contribution to the political discourse. Frank Rich avers that Hansberry “changed the American theatre forever,” as well as “sparked the growth of the black theatre movement in the 1960s.”²²¹ Rich’s appraisal secured Hansberry’s eminence as a theatre artist. That she relied on the theatre as a weapon to awaken the conscience of America validates that theatre had a profound effect on her. Hansberry’s commitment to the theatre was

²²⁰ Alfred Hickling, “Arts: Sweet Lorraine,” *Guardian (London)*, April 23, 2001, 14.

²²¹ Frank Rich, “Theatre: *Raisin in Sun*, Anniversary in Chicago,” *New York Times*, October 5, 1983, C24.

as an artist, but she was committed equally to politics, particularly the politics of the Civil Rights Movement—a politics that contracted to advocate indiscriminate equality for every American.

Exactly as did black civil rights organizations, Hansberry engaged in action for political change. The combination of artistic pursuit and political activism tied her to the Civil Rights Movement via civil rights organizations. This is to argue that Hansberry and black civil rights organizations had a symbiotic liaison, which afforded those organizations carte blanche to cash in on her literary status to advance their causes. She gained by having access and acquaintanceship with their powerful leaders, from Martin Luther King²²² to Malcolm X.²²³ More to the point, Hansberry not only had the quintessential civil rights play, she was the quintessential representative of the civil rights era for civil rights organizations. This explains why so many from all political persuasions offered sincere tributes on her death. Steve Carter informs us:

The integrationist Martin Luther King sent a message praising “her commitment of spirit” and “her profound grasp of the deep social issues confronting the world today.” The Marxist Paul Robeson and SNCC Executive Secretary James Forman delivered eulogies, and the Black Nationalist Malcolm X sat among the mourners.²²⁴

Robeson concurred with King: “It was a privilege to have known Lorraine. Her roots were deep in her people’s history. As an artist she reflected the light and struggles of our day in her work.” Hansberry’s friend and fellow activist James Baldwin sent a message of sympathy; playwright Paddy Chayefsky, entertainers Nina Simone and Sammy Davis Jr., and actor Shelley Winters, among many others, attended.²²⁵ More noteworthy, Hansberry’s commitment to civil rights organizations continued long after her death. She “left part of her \$115,000 estate to the civil

²²² William Branch, letter to author, April 26, 2006. Appendix 11, 286-287.

²²³ Dorothy Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gate: A Memoir* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), 150.

²²⁴ Carter, “Commitment amid Complexity,” 40.

²²⁵ William E. Farrell, “600 Attend Hansberry Rites; Paul Robeson Delivers Eulogy,” *New York Times*, January 17, 1965, 88.

rights cause.” In addition, “surplus income from trusts and, ultimately, the principal were left to civil rights organizations.”²²⁶ It is fair to say that Hansberry was the exemplary civil rights artist activist.

As stated earlier, before the existence of the modern Civil Rights Movement, everyone was aware of the housing discrimination problem. It was a problem that all the major civil rights organizations²²⁷ battled. Before 1963, much of the NAACP’s housing program concerned segregation in the housing market, particularly trying to influence legislative policies. Long before President Kennedy issued the executive order prohibiting racial discrimination in housing, Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, had asked the White House for such an order.²²⁸ Point of fact, housing discrimination was a major issue in the 1960 presidential campaign; Kennedy repeatedly promised to end it in all federal agencies with a stroke of the pen. When he did not act accordingly to do so, he was reminded that his commitment to end housing discrimination “helped him win 80 percent of the votes cast by Negroes during the presidential election.”²²⁹

In 1947, Loren Miller, who was an attorney and a member of the National Legal Committee of the NAACP, addressed the 38th Annual Conference of the NAACP. Beyond documenting the problems of substandard dwellings linked to housing segregation, Miller stated, “One of the greatest problems facing America and Americans today is that of housing.”²³⁰

The National Urban League’s major efforts were in housing research, attempting to influence national policy through fact-finding evidence and pro forma testimony before congressional

²²⁶ “Lorraine Hansberry Left Funds to Rights Cause,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1965, 25.

²²⁷ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP, founded in 1909), National Urban League (1910), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE, 1942), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC, 1957), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, 1960).

²²⁸ NAACP press release (November 24, 1961): “*NAACP Role in the Struggle for Freedom of Residence*.” Appendix 12, 288-293. It provides a valuable chronology of housing desegregation.

²²⁹ Jack E. Woods Jr., letter to the editor, *New York Times*, August 3, 1962, A16.

²³⁰ Loren Miller, Papers of the NAACP [untitled paper], Part I, 1909-1950, Reel 12, Group II/ Series A/Box 40, i.

committees. CORE's leaders also testified before congressional committees on the state of housing for African Americans. Marvin Rich of CORE stated, "The housing efforts include efforts to negotiate with realtors and to open tract housing in new suburbs and to meet the needs of individual Negro families."²³¹ SNCC, although it had no formulated policies, did advocate that the government provide money for housing to black communities.²³² SCLC, under King, acknowledged the housing problem but had no specific plan on how to solve it.

What *A Raisin in the Sun* did was to encourage black civil rights leaders to be more engaged and aggressive in housing policy. Hansberry focused the housing issue in such a way that political leaders had to concern themselves with it more than before; she placed it in the public discourse. The argument is not that *A Raisin in the Sun* did all of that by itself or that the play was a catalyst for major change, but that it was indisputably in the mix in the battle over segregation in housing.

As noted, Hansberry was the consummate activist; she not only added to the political-cultural climate by her creativity, she offered financial support and actively participated in many civil rights causes. She committed her talent, money, time, and energy. By contributing her literary prestige, she provided legitimacy to the Civil Rights Movement. Hansberry's commitment indicates that she had the same political sensibilities as her parents, who were active in the local chapters of the NAACP and the Urban League and provided financial support to many civil rights causes.²³³

Monson states that between 1960 and 1965, benefit concerts became a regular component of the jazz scene in New York, and all of the major civil rights organizations—including SNCC, the

²³¹ Marvin Rich, "The Congress of Racial Equality and Its Strategy," in *The Negro Protest*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 357 (January 1965): 114.

²³² Harold L. Wolman and Norman C. Thomas, "Black Interests, Black Groups, and Black Influences in the Federal Policy Process: The Cases of Housing and Education," *Journal of Politics* 32, no. 4 (November 1970): 881-882.

²³³ Smith, *Visions of Belonging*, 285.

NAACP, the SCLC, and CORE—organized benefit concerts as part of their fund-raising activities.²³⁴ The same was true for theatre, but those had started before the 1960s. James Robinson talked about a theatre benefit:

When I was executive secretary [CORE], from 1957 to 1961, we had a theatre party. I can't remember the playwright's name. We decided on the play before it opened. The playwright had great success. The play we picked flopped. We wrote everybody to return their tickets and told them they could have their money back or they could indicate all or part of it as a contribution. People returned their tickets and almost all of them gave us the value of the ticket as a contribution. So we made money on the theatre party even though we never had the show.²³⁵

This failure, which was a financial success for CORE, alerted the organization to the value of theatre parties and benefits. This was perhaps the first time CORE realized it could benefit from theatre. Of course, when *A Raisin in the Sun* came along, all of the black civil rights organizations capitalized on the play's theatre parties. Given that it was a huge success, 531 performances on Broadway,²³⁶ and with Hansberry's commitment to civil rights causes, these organizations did not hesitate to ask for assistance. Marvin Rich, who served in many capacities at CORE, acknowledged Hansberry's generosity to CORE: "We had many benefits. We were involved with Hansberry a fair amount. She raised money for us."²³⁷

Hansberry, who died of cancer at thirty-four, had a short career as a playwright, from approximately 1957 to 1965. Her success as a dramatist, although she wrote other plays, rests predominantly on *A Raisin in the Sun*; however, neither the length of her brief life nor the length of her career can measure her commitment to civil rights causes. A few noteworthy events provide an overview. An independent thinker, Hansberry was committed to social change long

²³⁴ Ingrid Monson, "Monk Meets SNCC," in *New Perspectives on Thelonious Monk*, *Black Music Research Journal* 19, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 189.

²³⁵ James R. Robinson, interview with author (September 11, 2006).

²³⁶ Sally Burke, *American Feminist Playwrights: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne, 1997), 129.

²³⁷ Marvin Rich, interview with author (September 14, 2006).

before she became a celebrity dramatist. In her early twenties, she was photographed marching on an NAACP student picket line against racial and religious discrimination.²³⁸ She also raised money that bought the station wagon that the three young students from the North [James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman] used before they were kidnapped and killed in Mississippi.²³⁹ Hansberry, who held concerts and meetings at her home in Croton-on-Hudson to raise money for civil rights organizations, became an active supporter of SNCC and socialized with John Lewis and other SNCC members. She assisted them in trying to defeat segregation in the South and wrote the text for SNCC's photo book *The Movement: Document of a Struggle for Equality* (1964)—all proceeds went to SNCC.²⁴⁰ [See letters from Julian Bond & J. Foreman.²⁴¹]

Hansberry was a friend of Daisy Bates, the civil rights activist and president of the Arkansas NAACP who assisted and advised the Little Rock Nine in how to enroll legally at Little Rock High School in 1957. Bates tried to get Hansberry to write her autobiography but was unsuccessful.²⁴² However, Bates did sell Hansberry a life membership in the NAACP for \$500.²⁴³ Then there was the legendary meeting with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy at which Hansberry told the attorney general that Jerome Smith was the only one in the room he should listen to, just before she walked out of the office. Hansberry had known Smith at least a year before the meeting. Smith was a CORE representative who had been a guest at Hansberry's Greenwich Village apartment.²⁴⁴ Before *A Raisin in the Sun* opened in New York, Hansberry had already been a guest of honor at civil rights organizations' events. She received one such invitation from the NAACP's director and counsel Thurgood Marshall, who became the first

²³⁸ Catherine Scheader, *They Found a Way: Lorraine Hansberry* (Chicago: Campus Publications / Children's Press, 1978), 26.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁴⁰ Carter, "Commitment amid Complexity," 39-53.

²⁴¹ Letters from Julian Bond and James Foreman. Appendixes 13-16, 294-298.

²⁴² Grif Stockley, *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 221.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ James Farmer to Lorraine Hansberry. Appendix 17, 299.

black Supreme Court justice. *A Raisin in the Sun* had already started to call attention to Hansberry as early as October 1958, the date of Marshall's invitation.²⁴⁵

Conclusion

This chapter advocates that *A Raisin in the Sun* did influence political processes and affect individuals, supporting the premise that the drama did politicize people into action and encourage participation in a social movement, the Civil Rights Movement. The first place to apply this concern is to members of the audience. Lloyd Richards and Philip Rose both stated that many leaders and politicians attended the play, particularly leaders from civil rights organizations. Stanley M. Isaacs,²⁴⁶ the minority leader of the New York City Council, and Cecil A. Partee, a state representative of the 22nd District of Chicago, sent letters to Hansberry expressing how moved they were by her drama. Partee, specifying the housing problem, stated that *A Raisin in the Sun* "reflected a great deal of insight into one of America's greatest problems." It is obvious from the two letters that Hansberry did capture the attention of politicians and policymakers. Hansberry moved not only general theatregoers and politicians. Letters also arrived from playwrights who were affected, ranging from Lofton Mitchell, who expressed how proud he was of her lending herself "to important and worthwhile things"²⁴⁷ to Elmer Rice, who praised Hansberry for the "social significance" of her play.²⁴⁸ Whether it is a letter to Hansberry's husband providing names of people in the theatre who might contribute to the goals of the Civil Rights Movement,²⁴⁹ or a letter from Hansberry to Daniel C. Thompson, a

²⁴⁵ Thurgood Marshall to Lorraine Hansberry. Appendix 18, 300.

²⁴⁶ Stanley M. Isaacs to Lorraine Hansberry. Appendix 19, 301.

²⁴⁷ Lofton Mitchell to Lorraine Hansberry. Appendix 20, 302.

²⁴⁸ Elmer Rice to Lorraine Hansberry (and reply). Appendixes 21 & 22, 303-304.

²⁴⁹ Dorothy Miller [SNCC] to Robert Nemiroff. Appendix 23, 305.

sociology professor at Howard University,²⁵⁰ responding to questions about civil rights, they showed Hansberry's commitment to civil rights. (See other letters to and from Hansberry.)²⁵¹

Equal housing was a long-standing goal of the civil rights organizations and Hansberry's importance is based not only on *A Raisin in the Sun* but also on her influence in focusing the debate on housing discrimination. The ultimate worth of *A Raisin in the Sun* is not its connection to the Civil Rights Movement nor how it has continued to excite the moral sense of Americans since its arrival on Broadway in 1959. Its ultimate value lies in what it provides for future generations. That value was perfectly expressed when the play was cited in a court case:

For those who were born during the second half of the Twentieth Century and thus may not be fully and personally familiar with the debilitation and humiliating effects of racial segregation (particularly, in housing) on an all-American (albeit black) family, they need only catch a showing of Lorraine Hansberry's play "A Raisin in the Sun," and preferably the movie of the play, starring Sidney Poitier, to begin to appreciate the perniciousness of those effects.²⁵²

The battle over housing segregation continues, and Hansberry continues to voice her protest. *A Raisin in the Sun* illuminates the sentiments of the time, showing the similarities between what was happening in neighborhoods around the country and what was on stage. It opposed the doctrine of segregated housing while attempting to transform individuals and change society. Plays are not likely to do that if they are not relevant to the audience. Clurman imparted as much when he stated that "a play is not a document, it is an address: the first consideration must be the relevance to the audience for which it is performed."²⁵³ The pertinence of Hansberry's drama to the audience was evident in its critical reception, relevance civil rights leaders also understood. Patterson indicated such significance when he declared that *A Raisin in the Sun* was "an integral

²⁵⁰ Daniel C. Thompson to Lorraine Hansberry (and reply). Appendixes 24 & 25, 306-310.

²⁵¹ See other letters; Kenneth Tynan, Brooks Atkinson, etc. Appendixes 26-33, 311-319.

²⁵² *P. R. Hall, Plaintiff, v. Lowder Realty Co., Inc., et al., Defendants*. Civil Action No. 97-T-1382-N. U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, Northern Division [263 F. Supp. 2d 1352, 2003 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 9615], 1362.

²⁵³ Harold Clurman, "Reflections on True Theatre," *Nation* 202, no. 20 (May 16, 1966): 587.

part of the struggle for Negro Rights.”²⁵⁴ He also stated pointedly that the drama was “a blow aimed at the policy of ghettos.”²⁵⁵

King, who said Hansberry was an inspiration, stressed the goal of the Civil Rights Movement while attacking segregation:

We do not have to look very far to see the pernicious effects of a desegregated society that is not integrated. It leads to “physical proximity without spiritual affinity.” It gives us a society where men are physically desegregated and spiritually segregated, where elbows are together and hearts are apart. It gives us spatial togetherness and spiritual apartness. It leaves us with a stagnant equality of sameness rather than a constructive equality of oneness.²⁵⁶

The poetry and verve in Hansberry’s dramatic depiction of segregation matches King’s verbal eloquence. Hansberry provided an exact portrayal of segregation several years before King’s speech. In addition, King offered a profound nod of approval to Hansberry’s method of attacking segregation: “Art can move and alter people in subtle ways because, like love, it speaks through and to the heart.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴ Patterson, “*A Raisin in the Sun*,” 47.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁵⁶ Martin Luther King Jr., “The Ethical Demands for Integration,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 118.

²⁵⁷ Clayborne Carson, senior ed., *Threshold of a New Decade, January 1959-December 1960*, vol. 5, *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 583 [letter to Sammy Davis Jr.]

Chapter Three:

**Yu Bet'er Watchit, Your Americanization's
Showing: Ossie Davis and His Purlie Victorious**

I make people laugh and thus change the world.

*Pierre Beaumarchais*²⁵⁸

In *Tragedy and Comedy*, Walter Kerr contends, “Comedy at its most penetrating derives from what we normally regard as tragic.”²⁵⁹ Racism, legally sanctioned social inequities, and the legacy of slavery are tragic aspects of American life. In fact, historical predicaments and circumstances of American slavery provided the ingredients of tragedy against which African Americans nourished their unique humor. While much of the arts and literature associated with American slavery, as well as the American Civil Rights Movement,²⁶⁰ was inevitably serious, and even solemn, humor and satire had a distinguished place in emphasizing the indignities and absurdities of segregation.

During the Civil Rights Movement era, laughter was employed to solidify an in-group affinity while simultaneously reducing the tension of those sharing the out-group experience, a point acknowledged by Joseph Boskin: “Laughter not only helps to make life bearable for the oppressed, it also eases relations with the oppressor.”²⁶¹ This premise does not argue that humor was the solution to solve race problems, it merely supports an assertion noted by C. E. Schutz, “To laugh at someone in political humor is to step toward community with him.”²⁶² That notion of facilitating communication or building community through the medium of humor is the foundation of this chapter, which shows how the use of comedy as a tool during the Civil Rights Movement era reduced tension while criticizing the sociopolitical status quo. Laughter had long been celebrated as a cathartic tool that strengthens resolve against systematic injustice before the

²⁵⁸ David L. Paletz, “Political Humor and Authority: From Support to Subversion,” *International Political Science Review*, no. 4 (October 1990): 492.

²⁵⁹ Walter Kerr, *Tragedy and Comedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 17.

²⁶⁰ The Civil Rights Movement will be referred to often in this chapter. To contextualize its significance, I rely on its context put forth by Darryl Dickson-Carr: “The Civil Rights Movement ushered in a period of national awareness and appreciation of African American politics and culture unparalleled since the Harlem Renaissance.” Darryl Dickson-Carr, *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 112.

²⁶¹ Joseph Boskin, “How Fast Is Slow, Baby,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1966, 259.

²⁶² Charles E. Schutz, *Political Humor* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977), 331.

Civil Rights Movement. Comedy and jokes have long been socially accepted means of breaking taboos or breaking down barriers.

Humor was a part of the progress of the Civil Rights Movement. While African-American artists used humor in every aspect of the arts, Horace Kallen puts forth an interesting premise, stating that comedy is “more frequently a matter for literature and drama than for the plastic arts.”²⁶³ This chapter links to that premise and thus concentrates on humor in the theatrical venue, focusing predominately on Ossie Davis’s *Purlie Victorious*. Playwright and activist Ossie Davis did have that requisite wit and used satire as a weapon in the struggle for civil rights, a struggle that surfaced on Broadway in his play *Purlie Victorious*.²⁶⁴

Raiford Chatman Davis (a.k.a. Ossie Davis, 1917-2005) was among the most progressive and active dramatists of the Civil Rights Movement era.²⁶⁵ In addition to his writing, he was also an actor, activist, and humanist for more than six decades. Davis, who started his career as an actor, had major roles in Broadway and Off-Broadway productions, ranging from replacing Sidney Poitier in Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) to playing opposite Judd Hirsch in Herb Gardner’s *I’m not Rappaport* (1986). His film and television roles are numerous [*No Way*

²⁶³ Horace M. Kallen, “The Aesthetic Principle in Comedy,” *American Journal of Psychology* 22, no. 2 (April 1911): 145.

²⁶⁴ *Purlie Victorious*’s Broadway cast: Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, Godfrey Cambridge, Helen Martin, Beah Richards, Alan Alda, Charles Welch, Ralph Robert, Sorrell Booke. *Purlie Victorious* was turned into a film, *Gone are the Days* (1963). All actors in the play, except Helen Martin--Hilda Haynes replaced her-- recreated their roles for the movie. *Purlie Victorious* was later adapted by Ossie Davis, Philip Rose, and Peter Udell into the musical *Purlie* (1970), which was nominated for a Tony award for best musical.

²⁶⁵ Mel Tapley states, and I am in complete agreement, “Ossie Davis is really one of the unsung heroes of Black Theatre and the civil rights struggle. Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte and Lena Horne and Sammy Davis Jr. certainly have paid their dues. But they will probably be the first to admit that Ossie and Ruby have made more appearances at the big rallies and the little-publicized programs of the Black community than many of our stars ever heard of.” (“Davis and Linden Great *I’m Not Rappaport* Team,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1986, 27.) This quote was not relied on to validate Davis’s commitment to civil rights causes, which is the purpose of the paper; it is included because it shows Davis and his wife, Ruby Dee, in an alliance that represents a true partnership. Davis and Dee, who were very committed political artists, were married for more than five decades. Critic Theophilus Lewis compared Davis and Dee as a husband-and-wife acting team to Alfred Lunt-Lynn Fontanne and Hume Cronyn-Jessica Tandy. [*Pittsburgh Courier*, November 21, 1959, SM1.] Davis and Dee performed in 11 stage productions together and celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with a joint autobiography, *In This Life Together* (1998). [Joan Harris, “Obituary: Ossie Davis: Actor and Activist Against Racial Stereotyping,” *Guardian*, February 8, 2005, 25.] During the Civil Rights Movement era, the couple was affiliated with the NAACP, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLS), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). While the political wherewithal of Davis is the focus of the paper, the point acknowledged here is that Dee was very much connected to and a major participant in Davis’s political activities.

Out (1950); *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990); *Grumpy Old Men* (1993); as well as appearances in several Spike Lee movies]. Davis began directing films himself during the “blaxploitation” period and his credits include *Kongi’s Harvest* (1970); *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970); *Black Girl* 1972; *Gordon’s War* (1973); and *Countdown at Kusini* (1976). He wrote several film and television scripts as well as a novel, *Just Like Martin* (1992). Davis also starred in many television dramas. In addition to *Purlie Victorious*, his plays include *The People of Clarendon County*,²⁶⁶ *Curtain Call*, *Mr. Aldridge*, *Sir*, a musical version of Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (unpublished), and *A Last Dance for Sybil* (2002).²⁶⁷ His mellow voice was widely used in narrations for television, documentaries, and movies.²⁶⁸

Davis nurtured his ambitions when he was in dramatic presentations in high school (Waycross, Georgia) and was encouraged to continue acting while a student of Sterling Brown’s at Howard University.²⁶⁹ He got his first Broadway role because of Dick Campbell (whom he studied with under the Rose McClendon players) in Robert Ardrey’s *Jeb*, “which was a stab against Southern bigotry and race prejudice.”²⁷⁰ Also while at Howard, Davis mentioned to Alain Locke that his ambition was ultimately to become a playwright.²⁷¹ After returning from military service in World War II, Davis continued with acting, studying under Abram Hill at the American Negro Theatre.

²⁶⁶ Although *The People of Clarendon County* was written in the 1950s and had a staged reading only once at union Local 1199 in 1955, Alice Bernstein, who discovered it among Davis’s papers at the Schomburg Center, is responsible for getting it published in 2007. For more on that play, see chapter 1, Loftin Mitchell’s *A Land Beyond the River*.

²⁶⁷ Davis wrote *A Last Dance for Sybil* for his wife, Ruby Dee. Although Dee did not perform in the play until 2002, Davis was working on the script as early as 1965. (*New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1965, 23.)

²⁶⁸ I would like to note that the material presented here is only a portion of the work attributed to Davis. While searching through his papers at the Schomburg Center, I was amazed at the amount of unpublished material (scripts for television and film, articles, and stage plays) I came across. Scholars will certainly examine more of his unpublished writings in the days to come.

²⁶⁹ Samuel Allen, “Recollections of Sterling Allen Brown: Wit and Wisdom,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 4, Sterling Brown: A Special Issue (Autumn 1998), 857.

²⁷⁰ “*Jeb Brought Two Great Actors Together*,” *New York Times*, March 30, 1946, 8.

²⁷¹ Theophilus Lewis, “Success for New Husband and Wife Acting Team,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 21, 1959, SM1.

Early in Davis's career as an actor, he not only worked more than black actors, he worked with many theatre artists who later became theatre legends. For example, he acted with Ruth Gordon in her play *The Leading Lady*;²⁷² he appeared in Garson Kanin's *The Smile of the World*;²⁷³ he starred with Rod Steiger, Jack Klugman, and Lloyd Richards in Paul Peters and George Sklar's *Stevedore*;²⁷⁴ and he worked with Helen Hayes in Joshua Logan's *The Wisteria Tree*, based on Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*.²⁷⁵ President Truman, Dr. Ralph Bunche, Eleanor Roosevelt, Mary Bethune, and other prominent figures saw him in a Washington, DC, production of *Tobacco Road*.²⁷⁶ Davis was also in revivals of George S. Kaufman and Edna Ferber's *The Royal Family*²⁷⁷ and Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures*.²⁷⁸ Although Davis was in William Stucky's short-lived play *Touchstone* in 1953, the significance of that year is the fact that he returned to playwriting. His *The Big Deal*, directed by Julian Mayfield, received its premiere production Off-Broadway in 1953.²⁷⁹ One critic noted that the play was written, produced, and directed by blacks.²⁸⁰ In 1953, Davis was also the stage manager of *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, which starred his wife, Ruby Dee.²⁸¹ Davis appeared in the musical *Jamaica*, starring Lena Horne and Ricardo Montalban.²⁸²

In addition to Davis's acting and dramatic writing undertakings, his political activities were always connected. For example, as a cast member of *Anna Lucasta*, he became the spokesman,

²⁷² Brooks Atkinson, "First Night at the Theatre," *New York Times*, October 19, 1948, 33.

²⁷³ Brooks Atkinson, "The Smile of the World," *New York Times*, January 13, 1949, 26.

²⁷⁴ J.B.S., "At the Theatre," *New York Times*, February 23, 1949, 30. [It is important to cite this article because it shows that Davis had a connection to George Sklar, whose play *And People All Around* will be covered in chapter 5.]

²⁷⁵ Brooks Atkinson, "First Night at the Theatre," *New York Times*, March 30, 1950, 39.

²⁷⁶ "Tobacco Road to Have Washington Prem Jan 13," *Afro-American*, December 24, 1949, 8.

²⁷⁷ Brooks Atkinson, "At the Theatre," *New York Times*, March 30, 1951, 28.

²⁷⁸ Brooks Atkinson, "First Night at the Theatre," *New York Times*, March 16, 1951, 35.

²⁷⁹ L.F., "The Big Deal Makes Off-Broadway Bow," *New York Times*, March 7, 1953, 13. [While 1953 was the year that Davis's play was produced, it was still a very tough time for black actors. Playwright Lofton Mitchell calls attention to the lack of job opportunities for black actors. While the article acknowledges the hardship for black actors, it is a very important, informed article that highlights exactly what was happening in the theatre world in Harlem. See his article for more details: *Amsterdam News*, September 12, 1953, 23.]

²⁸⁰ Ray Cole, "Negroes Produce, Write B'Way Play," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 21, 1953, 26.

²⁸¹ "Ruby Dee Heads Yiddish Play Cast," *Afro-American*, May 9, 1953, 7.

²⁸² Brooks Atkinson, "The Theatre: *Jamaica*," *New York Times*, November 1, 1957, 31.

representing the cast against claims of Baltimore's branch of the NAACP.²⁸³ It planned to boycott the production in support of the Actors' Equity Association's decision to boycott theatres unless they changed their policies of excluding blacks from their audiences. Although Davis was a major supporter of the NAACP, he sided with the cast of *Anna Lucasta*. In 1959, Davis appeared alongside Ralph Bellamy and Eli Wallach in Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial*, an Actors' Equity Association's integration showcase where one critic said the purpose of the showcase "was to demonstrate that more Negroes could be hired for plays and musicals without disturbing the integrity of a production or the author's intent."²⁸⁴ Finally, Davis was a speaker on race relations²⁸⁵ and, as a cast member of *A Raisin in the Sun*, he offered support for sit-ins in Alabama, "We all want to show our support for sit-ins. We can—by not buying at Woolworth until they integrate everywhere."²⁸⁶

As noted earlier, the impulse to become an artist in the theatre seized Davis at a young age. His political activism was equally an early impulse. Davis makes it clear that he was committed to civil rights causes long before the Civil Rights Movement era began:

When Ruby and I first came into the theatre in 1946, we involved ourselves with those pageants that were put on by the NAACP and other activities in the Urban League in which actors were always involved. We were the ones who went out and spoke to our people about Isaac Woods having his eye gouged out or about the four black people killed in Georgia, or the two men in army uniforms. We in the theatre were good for raising funds. Every night after the show, when we first came into the theatre, somebody would have a party down in the Village or on the East Side or uptown—we would go to those parties. Paul would be there. Orson Welles would be there. Marlon Brando would be there. We would talk about Willie McGee. We would talk about Rosa Lee Ingram. We would talk about the Martinsville Seven. We would talk about the cases of the day, and we would raise funds. We in the theatre represented a vocality that the world would listen to. And we sometimes were the only spokespersons available to the civil

²⁸³ "Anna Lucasta Irked by Baltimore NAACP," *Afro-American*, April 23, 1949, 1.

²⁸⁴ Arthur Gelb, "Stars Stage Plea for Negro Roles," *New York Times*, April 21, 1959, 37.

²⁸⁵ "Ossie Davis Speaker on Race Relations," *New York Amsterdam News*, February 13, 1960, 4.

²⁸⁶ "Pride of Alabama in Segregation Protest," *Afro-American*, June 25, 1960, 22.

rights struggle. And there was another thing that was happening, that we were aware of. We knew that every time we stood up on stage and said a sentence in correct English, it was an attack on the stereotypical image by which America conceived of black people. Just to be on stage, to show up, to be somebody was part of the struggle, changing the image by which America perceived us, and we were busy with it.²⁸⁷

Davis's sense of self and identity were totally enmeshed in the Civil Rights Movement. "I could not imagine myself being who I am," he acknowledged, "without having been active in the Civil Rights Movement."²⁸⁸ Novelist and critic Albert Guérard noted that "the artist does not suffer from being identified with a cause; if the cause is himself, a vital part of himself, it is also a fit element of his art. He suffers most from not being identified with his cause, from adopting and serving a purpose which remains alien to his personality."²⁸⁹ Guérard's sentiment is fitting of Davis.

As a performer and activist, politicians and media outlets sought Davis's political judgments and opinions. Davis's views were widely welcomed because he offered his "gentle humor and insight with a hard-hitting point of view."²⁹⁰ He also possessed that rare ability to find points of agreement in opposing arguments. This allowed him to draw upon ideas of integrationism and separatism and seek a middle ground. And, perhaps indicative of his success, W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King all attended performances of *Purlie Victorious*.²⁹¹

Purlie Victorious: Its Politics and Its Comedy

Purlie Victorious opened at the Cort Theatre in September 1961 and had a moderately successful run of 261 performances. Although African-American writers had addressed the situation of blacks in American society humorously and satirically in literature and comedy for decades, Davis's comic treatment of segregation not only provided the first opportunity most

²⁸⁷ Ossie Davis, interview with author (November 23, 2004).

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Albert Léon Guérard, *Art for Art's Sake* (New York: Schocken, 1936, 1963), 215.

²⁹⁰ "Ossie Davis: Talented, Versatile, Always Busy," *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1966, 13.

²⁹¹ Davis, interview.

white audiences and critics had to experience satire from a black artist in the theatre, it was a major black-white cultural affair.

Purlie Victorious revealed an archetypical Southern terrain [the old order of the cotton plantation], laden with pre-civil rights paternalism. While challenging the accepted politics of the South, Davis used humor to exaggerate the stereotypes (both black and white) that were prevalent in the minds of many Americans. The significant point here: Davis not only used the derogatory stereotypes of blacks, with which audiences were familiar because of white plays and minstrel shows, he also revealed the derogatory stereotypes of whites. His creative enterprise entertained and engaged black and white audiences.

In essence, while not accommodating racism, Davis used a well-known white Southern comical context to educate audiences about the vulgarity, grotesqueness, and stupidity of the Southern political model. With *Purlie Victorious*, Davis relied predominantly on rural characters that epitomized the preindustrial society.

Purlie Victorious satirizes the story of Purlie Victorious Judson, a self-ordained preacher who returns to his Georgia hometown to claim a \$500 inheritance that he feels is rightfully his. For him, it symbolizes the inheritance due blacks. Purlie, the character who personifies the defiant militant of the 1960s, knows that to obtain his inheritance it is necessary to outwit Ol' Cap'n Stonewall Jackson Cotchipee, the omnipotent figure who symbolizes the quintessential Southern plantation patriarch. Cotchipee not only owns and controls everyone in the area but was responsible for Purlie's leaving the area years earlier when he let Purlie feel the sting of his bullwhip. Purlie knows well that Cotchipee, his true nemesis, will not relinquish the money. In the context of good, clean, comic ridicule, Purlie, who has arrived prepared and armed with

stratagems for an oversized battle, calls on a cast of characters to assist in navigating the treacherous terrain in an attempt to obtain his inheritance.

Purlie relies on the battling spirit of his sister-in-law, Missy Judson, whose prime responsibility is to use her shrewdness (or, if necessary, a hard stick) to get her husband, Gitlow Judson (Purlie's brother), to sign on as a warrior in their camp. Gitlow, who is the embodiment of a devoted servant stereotype, is apparently on the wrong side, that of Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee's. Gitlow, who has been honored by Cotchipee with the position of Deputy-for-the-Colored, is the exemplary Uncle Tom whose obsequiousness knows no bounds, particularly when upholding the traditions of the Old South. His every motivation or action, even that of being the "cotton-pickinist cotton picker" for miles, reveals his steadfast loyalty to Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee:

MISSY

What the devil's the matter this time?

GITLOW

There I was, Missy, picking in the high cotton, twice as fast as the human eye could see. All of a sudden I missed a boll and it fell—it fell on the ground, Missy! I stooped as fast as I could to pick it up and—

(He stoops to illustrate. There is a loud tearing of cloth.)

Ripped the seat of my britches. There I was, Missy, exposed from stem to stern.

MISSY

What's so awful about that? It's only cotton.

GITLOW

But cotton is white, Missy. We must maintain respect. Bring me my Sunday school britches.

MISSY

What!

GITLOW

Ol' Cap'n is coming down into the cotton patch today, and I know you want your Gitlow to look his level best.

(Missy starts to answer.)

Hurry, Missy, hurry!

*(Purlie Victorious, 133)*²⁹²

²⁹² All quotes from the play are from Clinton F. Oliver and Stephanie Sills, eds., *Contemporary Black Drama: From "A Raisin in the Sun" to "No Place to Be Somebody"* (New York: Scribner, 1971).

Gitlow is key in Purlie's strategy; he needs him (and his Uncle Tomism) because Gitlow is the only one Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee trusts, as demonstrated by the following exchange:

Ol' CAP'N

Now, if you really want to know what the Negra thinks about this here integration and all lacka that, don't ask the Supreme Court—ask Gitlow. Go ahead—ask him!

CHARLIE

I don't need to ask him.

Ol' CAP'N

Then I'll ask him. Raise your right hand, Git. You solemnly swear to tell the truth, whole truth, nothing else but, so help you God?

GITLOW

(Raising hand.) I do

Ol' CAP'N

Gitlow Judson, as God is your judge and maker, do you believe in your heart that God intended white folks and Negra children to go to school together?

GITLOW

Nawsuh, I do not!

Ol' CAP'N

Do you, so help you God, think that white folks and black should mix and 'sociate in street cars, buses, and railroad stations, in any way, shape, form, or fashion?

GITLOW

Absolutely not!

Ol' CAP'N

And is it not your considered opinion, God strike you dead if you lie, that all my Negras are happy with things in the Southland just the way they are?

GITLOW

Indeed I do!

Ol' CAP'N

Do you think any single darky on my place would ever think of changing a single thing about the South, and to hell with the Supreme Court as God is judge and maker?

GITLOW

As God is my judge and maker and you are my boss, I do not!

Ol' CAP'N

(Turning in triumph to Charlie.) The voice of the Negra himself! What more proof do you want!

(Purlie Victorious, 152)

In the two dialogue segments above, the comicality stems from the fact that as outrageous as Gitlow and Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee are, the current politics have made them outdated. The pivotal aspect of comedy is very much about allowing audience members to detach from the particular or familiar. Thus, they feel detached from the characters of *Purlie Victorious*. They are delighted and entertained because of being superior to the characters, their imbecile antics, and their outdated politics. In this instance, the mirth-provoking centers on the racial stereotyping of the black Uncle Tom as well as the white plantation boss, making each the butt of jokes. What Davis manages to do is to bond blacks and whites in laughter, saying it is okay for in-group and out-group members to share in laughter. It is fair to state that a decade earlier the comedy would not have worked; Davis absorbed a politics that is in tune with the times.

In the spirit of the times, the Uncle Tomish Gitlow is deserving of the lump on the head he receives from his wife. The lump informs Purlie that Gitlow has been persuaded to join their team, against Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee. The final person needed to facilitate Purlie's machinations is Lutiebelle Gussiema Jenkins, a kitchen servant whose naïve, countrified ways are as genuine as her desire to become Purlie's fiancée. With his army in place, Purlie is ready to challenge the very wily Cotchipee.

In Purlie's analysis, he is entitled to the money that was left to one of his relatives. The money was actually willed to Purlie's Cousin Bee's mother. The mother died before receiving the money. Purlie's Cousin Bee also died before the money got to her. Thus, Purlie, who is next of kin, feels he is entitled to the money. To get the money, his scheme is straightforward; he will take Lutiebelle with him to visit Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee. Lutiebelle, whose resemblance to Purlie's long-departed cousin is uncanny, will masquerade as Cousin Bee for Cotchipee. If her impersonation does not completely convince him, Gitlow will seal the ruse by vouching that

Lutiebelle is the real Cousin Bee. With Lutiebelle's pretence and Gitlow's flattery, Cotchipee is duped and ready to hand over the inheritance to Lutiebelle. He merely wants the signature on the official document before turning over the money. As Lutiebelle is finalizing the scheme with her signature on the document, Purlie begins to consider what is to be done with the \$500 inheritance. The first order of business is to buy back Big Bethel, a church that would ultimately symbolize freedom and integration. Purlie never gets to the second order of business because Lutiebelle has inadvertently signed her own name to the document, which produces a victory smile on Cotchipee's face. Although the comedy's title suggests Purlie's victory in his battle with Cotchipee, he does not win the battle without assistance. Purlie comes to his inheritance through an unlikely source, Cotchipee's son, Charlie Cotchipee, who had been told by his father, "You are a disgrace to the Southland." Ol' Cap'n Cotchipee is in utter opposition to the "integrationary ideas" his son harbors.

Davis, while turning the comedic emphasis from blacks to whites, packs *Purlie Victorious* with comic ingredients that exploit the extravagance of Southern folkloric stereotypes. Among the array of caricatures are the bullwhip-toting Confederate plantation owner; the sadistic country sheriff, who is faithful to the law of Jim Crowism; the dutiful servant Mammy, who raised her white ward to honor her civil rights political beliefs; the pseudo-Confederate son (the white ward), who is all for integration; the Uncle Tom, who is not a visionary but keeps his eye on the butter for his bread; the Alabama gal, whose country charm reels in her man; and, of course, the Bible-spouting country preacher Purlie, who is not above modifying biblical phrases to fit his hellfire-and-brimstone purposes. The satirical treatment of those classic Southern types is done with good spirit, poking fun at everything from the Supreme Court to the NAACP, and

everyone from Abraham Lincoln to Martin Luther King—while simultaneously echoing the murmur of black liberation.

Purlie Victorious resonated with the politics of the Civil Rights Movement. To understand the humor of this period requires an understanding of the racially charged issues of the day. As this example suggests, Davis could address the most contentious of issues by reducing them to absurdities, which nonetheless forced the audience to think about the underlying situation: “Remember that big bus boycott they had in Montgomery?” asks Missy. “Well, we don’t travel by bus in the cotton patch, so Purlie boycotted mules!” (*Purlie Victorious*, 138)

Davis maintained that he was attempting to do with his play what Martin Luther King Jr. was attempting to do with love;²⁹³ and he noted that Malcolm X surprised him by stating, “I see you’re doing with laughter what I’m trying to do in other ways,”²⁹⁴ a sentiment captured in Purlie’s line near the end of the play,

...We gonna love you if you let us and laugh as we leave if you don’t. We want our cut of the Constitution, and we want it now: and not with no teaspoon, white folks—throw it at us with a shovel!
(*Purlie Victorious*, 183)

Davis stated, “Segregation is a ridiculous institution and it makes decent people do ridiculous things. Maybe if they [white people] can be made to laugh at it they can see how absurd it is.”²⁹⁵ One thing that is important about understanding a joke, it is helpful to make a distinction as to who is the butt of the joke and who is in the role of the trickster. In Davis’s jokes, he emphasized Purlie as the hero-trickster. Darryl Dickson-Carr asserts that the trickster character “makes frequent appearances in African American satire.”²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Joseph Wershba, “A Negro Playwright Tries to Kill Segregation with Laughter,” *New York Post*, October 11, 1961, 52.

²⁹⁴ Davis, interview.

²⁹⁵ Thomas Lask, “Farce—Not Force,” *New York Times*, September 24, 1961, X1.

²⁹⁶ Darryl Dickson-Carr, *African American Satire: The Sacredly Profane Novel* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001).

Deeply embedded in the politics of the Civil Rights Movement, Davis privileged *Purlie Victorious* with a satirical context, borrowing from the minstrel tradition, that replaces black stereotypes white culture had sanctioned and many white playwrights had promoted. In effect, Davis attacked the doctrine of white superiority while investing in a politics that encourages the mutual cooperation of blacks and whites. Promoting this better understanding between blacks and whites, Davis uses satire not simply as an instrument for social change; he employs satire to move forward black liberation. It is important to note that in the context of black liberation, *Purlie Victorious* [although it became a musical later] was not the standard song-and-dance repertory for blacks. Davis uses his satire to move blacks from the cultural margins toward the accepted position of the center, providing a relational model where blacks would have a positive sense of identity while simultaneously destroying black myths that had been held by whites.

Walt Whitman contends, "Literature is big only in one way—when used as an aid in the growth of humanities—a furthering of the causes of the masses—a means whereby men may be revealed to each other as brothers."²⁹⁷ With *Purlie Victorious*, Davis created a comedy that would meet Whitman's criterion of literature that matters. Davis's attack on segregation not only establishes a boundary to laugh at segregation. Advocating the essence of integration, he preaches (both literally and figuratively in his comedy) that we, as Whitman proclaimed, are "brothers."

Considering that Davis relied on satire to communicate his message, it is appropriate to offer an apt definition. This definition does not cover the full scope of satire—no definition can. However, it encompasses satire as is used by Davis. Satire in this case is a "literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end that institutions or humanity may

²⁹⁷ Richard Ruland, *The Rediscovery of American Literature: Premises of Critical Taste, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 90.

be improved. The true satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man's devising and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling."²⁹⁸

Satire, Ethnic Humor, and the Acceptance of the Black Comedian

From slavery onward, satire and other forms of humor have always been an integral part of the black experience, enabling African Americans to endure hardship and to survive physical and psychological cruelty. As historian Lawrence Levine noted,

Humor was one of the mechanisms Negroes in the United States devised not only to understand the situations they faced but also to mute their effect, to release suppressed feelings, to minimize suffering, to assert the invincibility of their own persona against the world, and to accomplish all of this, as Freud put it, "without quitting the ground of mental sanity."²⁹⁹

Addressing humor is the context of Levine's quote; however, more accurately, addressing ethnic humor is at the core of his premise. This is to posit that Davis engaged ethnic humor to assert a positive ethnic identity. Lois Leveen explores ethnic humor, asserting that it can be used for a positive ethnic identity.³⁰⁰

While there was an explosion of ethnic humor during the 1960s, Ann Maydosz emphasizes that ethnic humor has been around since Colonial times: "European settlers, Native Americans, and Africans retained the right to laugh at each other through the painful transitions all endured."³⁰¹ Ethnicity is and has always been an important element of comedy. One's ethnic identity has been used persistently as the object of ridicule. On the basis of familiar ethnic stereotypes, blacks, Irish, Italians, Jews, and other ethnic groups have been saddled with nagging humorous cultural constructs. Lawrence Mintz discusses the depiction of the Irish drunkard during the principal days of the American vaudeville and burlesque theatre period,

²⁹⁸ Frederick Kiley and J. M. Shuttleworth, eds., *Satire from Aesop to Buchwald* (New York: Odyssey, 1971), 479.

²⁹⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 344.

³⁰⁰ Lois Leveen, "Only When I Laugh: Textual Dynamics of Ethnic Humor," *Melus* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 44.

³⁰¹ Ann Maydosz, "A Study in Red and Black: Ethnic Humor in Colonial America," *Journal of Negro History* 85, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 300.

approximately 1890 through 1910.³⁰² Martha Ravits addresses the negative characteristics attached to the domineering Jewish mother.³⁰³ Stigmatized characteristics have been attached to all immigrant groups; audiences have enjoyed the imbecilic attempts of the stage Irishman, Jew, Italian, Swede, and others. Despite the negative stereotypes attached to ethnic groups, Leveen stresses the positive function of ethnic humor in mediating social acceptance of minorities or immigrant groups.³⁰⁴

Humor has always played a role in the process of Americanization, working to mediate conflicts between groups while bringing people and cultures together. Theatre has often relied on satire to make veiled but effective critiques of social and political systems. The paramount importance of satire, when considering *Purlie Victorious*, is that blacks created and controlled the product. Satire was by no means new to blacks. Comedian and satirist Godfrey Cambridge, who earned critical attention and received a Tony nomination for the Uncle Tom role of Gitlow Judson in the original production of *Purlie Victorious*, states, “The line that leads to Moms Mabley, Nipsey Russell, Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby and myself can be traced back to the satire of slave humor.”³⁰⁵ Perhaps the greatest African-American antislavery proponent, Frederick Douglass, relied on satire in his political writings and speeches.³⁰⁶ Loften Mitchell noted that the early 1900 production of Williams and Walker’s successful Broadway musical comedy *Bandanna Land*, where the plot hinges on a real estate scheme by blacks to buy property in a

³⁰² Lawrence E. Mintz, “Humor and Ethnic Stereotypes in Vaudeville and Burlesque,” *Melus* 21, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 19.

³⁰³ Martha A. Ravits, “The Jewish Mother: Comedy and Controversy in American Popular Culture,” *Melus* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 3.

³⁰⁴ Leveen, “Only When I Laugh,” 44.

³⁰⁵ Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side: Laughing, Lying and Signifying—The Underground Tradition of African-American Humor That Transformed American Culture, from Slavery to Richard Pryor* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 11.

³⁰⁶ Granville Ganter, “‘He Made Us Laugh Some’: Frederick Douglass’s Humor,” *African American Review* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 535-552.

white neighborhood, use it actively, and then sell it back to the alarmed white property owners nearby at a healthy profit, was a satire if nothing else.³⁰⁷

American humor inarguably connects to slavery. Robert Toll notes that the minstrel show was America's first popular entertainment form.³⁰⁸ Slavery and segregation shaped their own humor. Minstrel shows, which perpetuated stereotypes of blacks--Mammy, Sambo, Aunt Jemima, Stepin Fetchit, Pompey, Uncle Toms, as well as other caricatures--as contented, subservient, or singing and dancing buffoons, achieved fame of mythic proportions. All of that was passed on to theatre, radio, movies, and television. Such reprehensible characters and stereotypes became part of the popular culture and most people welcomed the humor without measuring the humiliation. People, whites and blacks, were so familiar with the characters that they did not think about how the images and depictions degraded blacks.

Humor was an integral part of established stereotypes that blacks could not escape. In-group humor, which was not for the masters or for whites, provided coded language for group cohesiveness. This humor often relied on idioms that those outside the in-groups would not understand; it also relied on perpetuated stereotypes of blacks as lighthearted, harmless, incompetent imbeciles incapable of humor. The caricature was so complete that humor ensconced itself around it. For example, *Pompey and his Master* jokes fit into this category:

Pompey, how do I look?
 O, massa, mighty.
 What do you mean "mighty," Pompey?
 Why, massa, you look noble.
 What do you mean by "noble"?
 Why, sar, you just look like one lion.
 Why, Pompey, when have you ever seen a lion?
 I see one down in yonder field the other day, massa.
 Pompey, you foolish fellow, that was a jackass.

³⁰⁷ Loftin Mitchell, "History of the Negro in American Theatre," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 1, 1965, 24.

³⁰⁸ Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

Was it, massa? Well, you look just like him.³⁰⁹

In addition to this in-group humor, there was also the pervasive humor of the outsiders. A creation of whites, it depicted blacks as a source of hilarity; it evoked a romanticized Southern tradition in which blacks were happy and harmless. It included the black-faced comedian tradition, with both blacks and whites; its purpose was to provide humor for whites to laugh at blacks and the black caricatures. Thus, the black comic who was on stage was there for the entertainment of whites. The humor was tied to self-ridicule and self-debasement. This humor by blacks was not masochistic, self-directed ethnic humor manifesting an intra-psychic tension; the humor was purely for white audiences. The NAACP's condemnation of the blackface comedy performers reduced its popularity and ultimately eliminated the practice from the stage.

The relationship of black comedians and black audiences to blackface caricatures is complex. Historically, blacks, as stated, relied on humor to alleviate painful experiences. A comparison can be made of the historical and cultural context of Jewish humor to the humor of blacks. Elliott Oring argues:

The conception of a Jewish humor derives from a conceptualization of Jewish history as a history of suffering, rejection, and despair. Given this history, the Jews should have nothing to laugh about at all. That they do laugh and jest can only signal the existence of a special relationship between the Jews and humor and suggests that the humor of the Jews must in some way be distinctive from other humors which are not born of despair.”³¹⁰

In fact, Davis, who acknowledged that *The World of Sholom Aleichem* was the catalyst for his comedy,³¹¹ goes on to concur with Oring:

Ruby and I profited from our association with Jewish actors and directors in the theatre. Howard Da Silva, and others, and the Jewish community provided more than token assistance in the civil rights struggle. Jews knew

³⁰⁹ Gilbert Osofsky, *Puttin' on Ole Master* (New York: Harper, 1969), 22.

³¹⁰ Elliott Oring, "The People of the Joke: On the Conceptualization of a Jewish Humor," *Western Folkway* 42, no. 4 (October 1983): 266-267.

³¹¹ Lask, "Farce—Not Force," X3.

better about oppression. They had suffered it personally, and they, at the beginning, were the outsiders who put themselves on the line. It was from our association with distinguished Jewish actors in the play *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, which was done downtown in 1953, that was an essential part of our development with actors.³¹²

Actor Marlon Brando, speaking of ethnic humor, connects the experiences of blacks and Jews: “The Negroes and the Jews have produced more humor than any other groups in the country. Their contributions to humor have been fantastic. It may be that the centuries of oppression and living apart from other people made them develop their special kinds of humor.”³¹³

Sociologist David Riesman has argued that ethnic humor actually functions to liberate the dominant culture from stereotypes and oppressive behavior. In other words, it is not merely a palliative for the ethnic group in question, but it is a transformative agent for the larger society. Seeing a parallel with Jewish Americans, Riesman wrote,

That Jews and Negroes could climb, and even avoid the ethnic affronts, most easily in the arts and entertainments, put them in a good position of leadership when the larger society itself shifted to embrace consumptive values. Thus it is that the ethnics are the ones who liberate the majority. Increasingly, America’s play patterns may suffer from the lack of a customary though under-recognized stimulus and élan when there are no more immigrants or people close to immigrant culture.³¹⁴

Humor, like societal taboos, constantly changes. Viewed against the backdrop of an emerging transformative politics, humor in the 1960s by blacks drastically changed. Nancy Arnez and Clara Anthony offered a perceptive evaluation of the period. Framing their argument in the context that the role of a social satirist is to change society or to change the pattern of behavior, they demonstrated how changes made the culture more receptive to social satire.³¹⁵

That President John F. Kennedy was receptive to political satire also contributed to the changing

³¹² Davis, interview. For more about Davis’s association with *The World of Sholom Aleichem*, see: Miles M. Jefferson, “The Negro on Broadway, 1953-1954: A Baffling Season,” *Phylon* 15, no. 3 (1954): 255-256.

³¹³ Murray Schumach, “Brando Urges Use of Ethnic Humor,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1964, 42.

³¹⁴ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 323-324.

³¹⁵ Nancy Levi Arnez and Clara B. Anthony, “Contemporary Negro Humor as Social Satire,” *Phylon* 29, no. 4 (1968): 341.

atmosphere and greater acceptance of the genre.^{316/317} As the politics of the 1960s (the decade of radical changes) redefined African-American national identity, it became increasingly possible for unabashedly politicized black comedians and satirists to emerge and reshape the perception of the African-American community for blacks and whites alike. The impact of comedy on the Civil Rights Movement ushered in what was claimed to be “a relaxation in the longstanding, well-meant but dreary taboo against racial or ethnic humor.”³¹⁸ The ascendancy of many black satirists directly linked to the progressive attitudes that had come about because of the Civil Rights Movement. Black comedians began to believe that their humor had to be part of the emerging Movement. Out of this milieu, black satirists rose to popularity and began to share their humor with a wider audience. In the process, long-established stereotypes and caricatures that ridiculed and debased blacks were attacked and eliminated.

Amos 'n' Andy serves as an example to illustrate the elimination of general ridicule and debasement of blacks. White vaudevillian actors Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden created the comic serial that started out as the radio program *Sam 'n' Henry* in 1926; *Sam 'n' Henry* ultimately became *Amos 'n' Andy* in 1928 and went on to become a “national mania.”³¹⁹ To exemplify the significance and vitality of *Amos 'n' Andy*, after George Bernard Shaw returned to England from his visit to the United States, he said, “There are three things which I shall never forget about America—the Rocky Mountains, Niagara Falls, and *Amos 'n' Andy*.”³²⁰

Correll and Gosden, who drew on years of experience as blackface comedians, depicted the black characters on radio for decades; point of fact, many people (whites and blacks) thought the

³¹⁶ “U.S. Satires on Kennedys, God, Barred from London Stage,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, July 21, 1962, A3.

³¹⁷ Arthur Gelb, “Satire Follows Kennedy to Cape,” *New York Times*, July 9, 1962, 35.

³¹⁸ “Comedians: Humor, Integrated,” *Time*, February 17, 1961, 68.

³¹⁹ *Amos 'n' Andy* occupied a unique place on the radio because of its racial angle. This by no means suggests that it was the only successful radio comedy-drama. *Life with Luigi*, which dealt with the experiences of the Italian immigrant Luigi Basco in Chicago, and *The Goldbergs*, which dealt with the experiences of the stereotypical matriarch Mama Goldberg, were also successful radio comedies. Other successful radio comedy-dramas: *Lum and Abner*, *Easy Aces*, *Vic and Sade*, *Myrt and Marge*. After a long run in radio, several of the shows were transferred to television, where they were short-lived, as was *Amos 'n' Andy*.

³²⁰ Mel Watkins, “What Was it about *Amos 'n' Andy*?” *New York Times*, July 7, 1991, BR1.

two white men were actually blacks. The program, which became a part of the national conscience early in its inception, was saturated with topical satire during its long duration, extending through the early days of radio, the Depression, and World War II. The show not only made Correll and Gosden very wealthy men, it also “gave birth to a daily *Amos ‘n’ Andy* comic strip, a candy bar, toys, greeting cards, and phonograph records, as well as two books and a film.”³²¹ Despite the prominence, influence, and exceptional success of the show, *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was in contradiction to an emerging politics. Melvin Ely states, “Roy Wilkins and Walter White of the NAACP had a point when they asserted that a large part of what millions of white Americans ‘knew’ about blacks had been learned from *Amos ‘n’ Andy*.”³²² While *Amos ‘n’ Andy* did counter some stereotypes of blacks (ignorance, venality, laziness, dishonesty, promiscuity, etc.), the show was ultimately consigned to the trash bin of racist stereotyping. Ely notes, “the show had become the ultimate metaphor of whites’ casual contempt for blacks.”³²³ With the emergence of a black consciousness, there was a disconnection from the white cultural hegemony; humor by blacks found its own artistic identity. The humor of Correll and Gosden, or what Mel Watkins refers to as their “racial ventriloquism,”³²⁴ no longer had a place in the artistic identity of blacks. *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was linked to a past that reinforced racial stereotypes—it was part of something that was dying out and had to be eliminated. This is a significant point because it notes a key distinction between *Amos ‘n’ Andy* and *Purlie Victorious*. Many of the comical situations of *Amos ‘n’ Andy* were designed to preserve the social distance between whites and blacks—keeping blacks in their place while maintaining a sense of racial superiority for whites. Whereas *Amos ‘n’ Andy* was stuck in the dilemma of black stereotypes it

³²¹ Melvin Patrick Ely, *The Adventures of Amos ‘n’ Andy: A Social History of an American Phenomenon* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 5.

³²² *Ibid.*, 9.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ Watkins, “What Was it about ‘*Amos ‘n’ Andy*’?”

had nurtured (in the tradition of whites laughing at blacks), *Purlie Victorious*, which was opposed to socially acceptable negative stereotypes, concerned itself with the replacement of black stereotypes while fostering a tradition in which whites and blacks would laugh together. Thus, the irony is that the NAACP and other civil rights organizations campaigned vigorously against *Amos 'n' Andy* after black performers took over the roles on television. The *Amos 'n' Andy* racial controversy became too big and ultimately brought about the demise of an American phenomenon. The 1960s brought an end to *Amos 'n' Andy* and, similarly, the collapse of the Sambo tradition. In *Sambo...*,³²⁵ Joseph Boskin provides the history of the caricature, tracing the rise and disgrace of Sambo, from his Colonial period/minstrel adventures to the tumultuous civil rights era of the 1960s. He reveals how the Sambo image was undercut during the 1930s and ultimately died in the 1960s. Thus, Sambo jokes once found to be acceptable had become unacceptable and offensive. When Correll and Gosden made their last broadcast on November 25, 1960, the satire by whites to depict the black experience came to an end. The emerging black satirists gained in popularity.

As argued earlier, the acceptance of black satirists during the Civil Rights Movement did not indicate that blacks had not relied on satire before. While satire had not been as ubiquitous prior to the Movement, it was very much a part of the black humor tradition. Comedy, like music, has always been an outlet for blacks to express entrenched beliefs about whites, justice, and a plethora of other concerns. Blacks now had a window of opportunity to express the cultural distinctiveness of their comedy publicly. Hitherto, blacks expressing themselves through comedy provided predominantly a black-on-black experience; many of them played mostly in black clubs to black audiences. For many whites, black comedians really did not exist. They

³²⁵ Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

knew nothing of them. Therefore, when the explosion of black comedians occurred, it appeared as if it had come out of nowhere. Mel Watkins explains that this was not the case:

The explosion of assertive black satire unleashed in America's popular culture during the sixties did not represent the sudden emergence of a new, militant perception or recently acquired penchant for ethnic chauvinism; instead, it was more a public unveiling of a covert or privately held sardonic view of America that many common black folks had held for decades.³²⁶

Satire was the genre Cambridge and other black comedians relied on to expose the foibles of American society, as well as to explore the areas of politics and culture considered too taboo for public discussion. Cambridge, who understood satire to be a product of sophistication, concurs with Davis that segregation was absurd and did his part to ensure his audiences participated in the advocacy of brotherhood, via the melting pot:

I reduce truths to the simplest and point up the absurdity. I regard myself not as a Negro concentrating on racial comedy, but as a satirist who deals in universal human foibles. When I talk about Negroes being afraid of other Negroes, I could talk about my Italian friends who are afraid another Italian is going to move in and open a pizza place, or my Jewish friends who are afraid another Jew is going to move in and open a Hebrew National delicatessen. Most people try to run away from their ethnic groups. This way to the melting pot. Let's melt!³²⁷

The melting pot experiment resulted in what one critic observed as "Negro and white people are beginning to laugh together about the most serious affliction of American society."³²⁸ The laughter was revelatory, emancipating its participants from the prison of prejudice while forging a connecting bridge to the world of brotherhood.

The brotherhood motif was very pervasive, omnipresent in the material of many black comedians. For example, with the same focus, Slappy White echoes Cambridge. Watkins highlights how White used gloves (one white and one black) while doing his "Brotherhood

³²⁶ Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 462.

³²⁷ Mel Gussow, "Laugh at This Negro, but Darkly," *Esquire*, November 1964, 95.

³²⁸ Louis E. Lomax, "The American Negro's New Comedy Act," *Harper's Magazine*, June 1961, 41.

Creed” material: “At the end of his act, he would say: ‘Racial jokes are not going to solve the problem we have in this country. I don’t tell racial jokes to offend anyone. I try to create a little humor so that all people can laugh.’ “He would then take the gloves out of his pocket and put them on. He held up his hands with the white and black gloves, and moved them expressively as he delivered the following recitation:

If the white man and the black man
Would walk hand in hand.
We could make this a wonderland.
You’ve got George Washington,
We’ve got Booker T.
You’ve got men in Congress
And so do we.
We’ll stop calling you ofay,
You stop calling us spades.
Together we could wipe out poverty, disease,
And we could conquer outer space.
So why don’t we get together
And let all men join the human race.

He would then clasp the white and black gloves together as a dramatic symbol of brotherhood.”³²⁹ In the context, the brotherhood creed is significant for black satirists and comedians because it stays clear of the dual communication that was inherent in their material. There was no ambiguity or opposing interpretations; it was a simple message not veiled in coded language.

To understand how this brotherhood theme from the black satirists enabled “colored and white to laugh together about their mutually discomfoting problems for the first time in a half century,”³³⁰ it is imperative to understand the social significance of Dick Gregory. Gregory was the first major black comedian to stray from the coded language process. His comedy was targeted for the brotherhood audience.

³²⁹ Mel Watkins, interview with author (February 24, 2009).

³³⁰ Arthur Steuer, “The Space for Race in Humor: Dick Gregory Places it on the Pad,” *Esquire*, November 1961, 146.

Dick Gregory: Civil Rights Activist Who Outlined the Route for *Purlie Victorious*

“Before Dick came on, a Negro comedian couldn’t get arrested,”³³¹ stated Cambridge. Gregory, noted as the first black comedian to “make his way into the nightclub big time,”³³² emerged, argued Watkins, “at a time not only when the distance between comedians and audiences was being erased but also when the established public barriers between whites and blacks were being challenged at lunch counters and flaunted through integrated freedom rides.”³³³ The point argued here is that the politics of the time connected to the ideals of democracy; thus, Gregory had more political and cultural freedom and therefore was not constrained within the ideologically defined limits sanctioned for blacks. While Gregory received recognition for expanding the boundary for black satirists, other black comedians remained within the defined boundary of black audiences. Redd Foxx (John Elroy Sanford), Pigmeat Markham (Dewey Markham), Moms Mabley (Loretta Mary Aiken), LaWanda Page (Alberta Peal), and Rudy Ray Moore are some of the black comedians who maintained a black fan base and were not widely known by white audiences until later.

The satirical style of humor presented by Gregory and other black satirists was well received by white and black audiences. Comedian Darryl Littleton (a.k.a. D’Militant) argued that seven comedians (Nipsey Russell, Slappy White, Timmie Rogers, George Kirby, Dick Gregory, Bill Cosby, and Godfrey Cambridge) were mainly responsible for comedy innovations during the civil rights era.³³⁴ Although they connected to their artistic ancestors, their new approach provided opportunities for them to have a wider audience base. It is interesting to note that the rising status of these comedians was not solely due to an acceptance of satire. They valued a

³³¹ Gussow, “Laugh at This Negro,” 94.

³³² “Comedians: Humor, Integrated,” 68.

³³³ Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 500.

³³⁴ Darryl Littleton, *Black Comedians on Black Comedy: How African-Americans Taught Us to Laugh* (New York: Applause Theatre and Cinema Books, 2006)

standard of comedy that shunned vulgarity and profane language; and they eschewed the minstrel tradition. Most important, many of these comedians, even if they did not graduate, had attended college. For example, Godfrey Cambridge had received a scholarship to study medicine before opting out to become an actor. Gregory, who had a degree in business administration, was a graduate of Southern Illinois University.³³⁵ Arthur Gelb, who tied Gregory to education by stating that his comedy was laden with “cerebral wisecracks” attributed Gregory’s success to “his ability to examine the foibles of both black and white without a trace of rancor or pretension and without any stooping or loss of dignity. He is, unlike such comedians as Rochester or *Amos ‘n’ Andy*, caricaturist rather than a caricature.”³³⁶

This connection to education not only informed, contextualized, and enriched the material used; it also meant greater acceptance of the comedians. For black comedians, education was a liberating factor that deepened their stock value and was equally a factor that generated a greater likelihood of a positive attitude from whites. In fact, it played a significant role in their popularity.

Gregory’s emergence surprised many black comedians, particularly because he was doing material that many of them had already done. Stealing/borrowing material from/among comedians was not an unusual practice; it was quite common. Slappy White accused Gregory of stealing his material and challenged him to a verbal battle of humor.^{337/338}

Watkins provides the details of the Gregory-White feud, outlining that while Gregory was performing at the Blue Angel in New York City in 1961, Nipsey Russell, Slappy White, and Timmie Rogers showed up one night, with a tape recorder openly displayed on their table. They

³³⁵ George E. Pitts, “Comedian Dick Gregory Making it Big,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 18, 1961, A22.

³³⁶ Arthur Gelb, “Comic Withers Prejudice Clichés,” *New York Times*, March 20, 1961, 34.

³³⁷ Bob Hunter, “Slappy White Again Challenges Dick Gregory to Verbal Battle,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 15, 1962, 21.

³³⁸ “White Tells Friends His Chicago Rival Is Pirating His Best Gags,” *Jet*, March 2, 1961, 64.

watched the show with apparent contempt. Later, White wrote Gregory a letter where he stated, "We wanted to find which of our material not to use anymore."³³⁹

The White-Gregory feud was still news when a new feud flared up between the two. While performing on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, in view of approximately 20 million television viewers, White stated the usual, "I don't tell racial jokes because they don't solve anything." He then did his white and black gloves dramatization. Gregory, insulted by White's remark, replied: "What does he mean racial jokes don't solve anything. They got him his job." Gregory goes on to add, "The remark was unfair, untrue and unnecessary."³⁴⁰ Gregory's response put Ed Sullivan in the middle of the ongoing feud. In a letter to *Jet* magazine, Sullivan replied to Gregory's statement.³⁴¹

³³⁹ Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 498.

³⁴⁰ "Slappy White TV Remarks Sparks," *Jet*, January 18, 1962, 60.

³⁴¹ "Ed Sullivan Defends Slappy White in Feud with Dick Gregory," *Jet*, February 8, 1962, 60-61.

If I understand your coverage of the Slappy White-Dick Gregory "feud" as reported in your January 18 issue, Gregory wants to segregate Slappy because the veteran Harlem funnyman stopped our TV show cold with his "white glove-black glove" dramatization of the unity theme.

So apparently Gregory believes only in integration if it excludes all show-stopping Negro comics. Now, judging from *Jet*, Gregory also wants to segregate radio commentators. He is threatening to sue Cleveland's WBAQ commentator Valena Williams. Why? Because exercising her privilege of free speech, Valena told her radio listeners that "when Gregory starts being a race relations expert, he's often misunderstood and quite unfunny." In other words, she thinks that he's a bore and a drag. Well, opinions vary. That's show business.

Gregory or *Jet* says that the thin-skinned Negro comic who is making some dough by giving a sepia twist to Mort Sahl's brilliant pioneering is responsible for the engagement of Negro comics in night clubs and hotels. Well, I hope so, because our TV show has been doing that job since our opening TV shows back in 1948, and I'd like to get some help. Starting in 1948, 14 years ago, we have used Negro performers 52 weeks a year, and once they appeared on our show they were engaged by top bookers around the country.

Jet might note that George Kirby first appeared on our stage back in 1949. He's done mighty well ever since. Nipsey Russell was on our stage back in 1957 and immediately got top bookings. Slappy White is only voicing the feeling of show business "pros" when he urges Gregory to remember that long before he appeared on the scene, other Negroes had performed tremendous services to their race that dwarf Gregory's small contribution.

Slappy simply says that all young Negro performers might well remember the debt they owe to trail-blazers like Bert Williams, W. C. Handy, Tim Moore, heavyweight champion Joe Louis, baseball's Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella and Willie Mays, Bill (Bojangles) Robinson, Mary McLeod Bethune, Duke Ellington, Harry Belafonte, Eartha Kitt, Miller and Lyles, Florence Mills, Della Reese, Dr. Ralph Bunche, Billy Eckstine, Billy Kenny and the Ink Spots, the late Canada Lee, the great Ella Fitzgerald, the Berry Brothers, unforgettable Mills Brothers, Marian Anderson and Louis Armstrong,

Despite the feud and Sullivan's remarks, White claimed that he had no hard feelings towards Gregory, adding conciliatorily, "We might as well face it, that Dick's success has helped all of us comics make more money."³⁴²

While White claimed to avoid the symbiotic relationship between entertainment and social commentary, which was clearly Gregory's premise, Watkins stated that Gregory "had devised a stand-up persona that cast him as a patient, self-assured ironist, capable of dispensing witticisms about racial relationships with cool detachment."³⁴³ His practice of directing laughter at himself and detaching himself from an inherent identification was essential to his success.

This was astute of Gregory because Francois Roustang argues, "laughter must be directed toward ourselves, or at least imply a 'we' in which we are included. One can also expect others to respect themselves in return, that is, to hold at a distance the morbidity which surely haunts and tempts them."³⁴⁴ Roustang goes further: "To laugh at oneself is to take the minimal distance toward oneself which allows us to appraise what we do think, and say, as would someone who is both exactly severe and liberally indulgent."³⁴⁵

Watkins directly connects the emerging comic spirit to the Civil Rights Movement, arguing that many Americans "were primed for a satirical African-American voice that mirrored the moral and ethnical candor displayed by such civil rights leaders as Martin Luther King Jr."³⁴⁶ Gregory's civil rights activities included comedy acts in prisons, as well as benefits for CORE

American's greatest and best loved ambassador to the world. In other words, Slappy tells Gregory to stop taking himself so seriously.

Long before the Freedom Riders, our show had introduced hundreds and hundreds of Negro performers to millions of American and Canadian homes. And let it be said to the credit of the South, that our show has always been top rated below the Mason-Dixon line. There's nothing wrong with Gregory that a few years of living won't cure.
Sincerely, Ed Sullivan

³⁴² Masco Young, "'Gregory Helps Us,' says Slappy White," *Afro-American*, April 14, 1962, 15.

³⁴³ Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 498.

³⁴⁴ Francois Roustang, "How Do You Make a Paranoiac Laugh?" trans. Doug Brick, in "French Issue," *Modern Library Notes* 102, no. 4 (September 1987): 712.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 714.

³⁴⁶ Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 500.

and the NAACP. He also marched in many events sponsored by SNCC.³⁴⁷ As a result, because of the time he spent in Southern jails, picketing, and at protest marches and other civil rights events, Gregory had little time for comedy and eventually left comedy to devote his time to politics. Gregory summed up the period by stating, “My career was interfering with my demonstrating.”³⁴⁸ Gelb vouched that Gregory was “probably doing every bit as much good as the N.A.A.C.P.”³⁴⁹ This tribute to a comedian is not to be undervalued.

Watkins acknowledges that during the 1960s, Gregory eclipsed all comedians as he catapulted to the top of the comedy game.³⁵⁰ Gregory’s influence was immense; with his satire, he paved the way for many black comedians. He also influenced the progress of satire on the stage, particularly with Davis and his *Purlie Victorious*.

Gregory and Davis have more in common politically and aesthetically than scholars have acknowledged. Their values, attitudes, dispositions, as well as political and cultural concerns are almost identical. Foremost, both embodied an uncompromising commitment to the Civil Rights Movement. Both were very much attuned to and fought the social institutions that were handicapping blacks. They used their power as artists to make audiences aware of, and articulated concerns about, an array of social and political problems, especially segregation. Furthermore, Gregory and Davis continued their political activism long after the Civil Rights Movement was over. Both placed their satire within the framework of a linguistic sophistication, where they relied on the total range of the comic’s arsenal: puns, one-liners, malapropisms, double-entendres, parody, and put-downs. Finally, both felt that they had to use their talent for a higher purpose. Robert Lipsyte discussed why comedy had to do that for Gregory:

³⁴⁷ Patrick J. Owen, “Gregory Came to Town,” *New Republic*, March 28, 1964, 10.

³⁴⁸ Dick Gregory, with Shelia P. Moses, *Callus on My Soul: A Memoir* (Atlanta: Longstreet, 2000), 83.

³⁴⁹ Arthur Gelb, “Comic Withers Prejudice Clichés,” 34.

³⁵⁰ Watkins, *On the Real Side*, 492.

He began to see that comedy without purpose was just another way of black guys dancing for white people. Comedy used in the service of what he felt was righteousness—remember, this was a God-fearing man—and civil rights was a much higher order than just getting laughs. People who do that, if you ask them why, they kind of look at you with a certain level of disdain. “*This is what you’re supposed to do—why aren’t you doing more?*” He saw it as a natural progression. Yeah, it was great to be making a fortune at Playboy Clubs, but he was talking to boozing traveling salesmen who were trying to feel up the bunnies. There was something higher than that.³⁵¹

That changed approach to comedy ultimately garnered Gregory the respect of many cultural and political leaders.

Davis, too, talked about the moral purpose of what he did:

For me, it meant that I was given the opportunity to join my art, my craft, with my life’s work and devotion as a citizen and as a black man. The Civil Rights Movement gave me a wider, deeper, broader context to everything I did that would have been unavailable otherwise. For example, now when I look to see what’s happening with the participation of black artists, black men, and black women, there is a cultural thinness—a consumer culture. Martin Luther King warned us of materialism. Well, materialism is in the saddle now. We lack some broad, ethical, and moral purpose to unify us as a people, black, white, or otherwise. We have celebrity now. We have consumption, selfishness, greed as the things that describe our activities—and that’s dangerous. A young person coming into the theatre today does not have access to the moral seriousness of the purpose that was present when I came into the theatre. You can still be a deep person. You can still be committed. There are still marvelous things that need to be done. But when I came in, that purpose was an automatic and natural part of what I meant by being alive. It’s not there anymore.³⁵²

Gregory’s big break occurred in January 1961, and Davis’s *Purlie Victorious* opened on Broadway in September that same year. Gregory did facilitate a significant connection between what he was doing as a stand-up comedian and what Davis would do with *Purlie Victorious*.

This is a point acknowledged by Harry Belafonte:

³⁵¹ Gerald Nachman, *Seriously Funny: The Rebel Comedians of the 1950s and 1960s* (New York: Pantheon, 2004), 502 [To see what finally made Gregory commit his life to civil rights causes, see his interview in *Playboy* (August 1964).].

³⁵² Davis, interview.

Dick Gregory was the most important satirist of his time....He enriched our Movement through his humor.... He said outrageous things and if you did not laugh at his humor, you would go out and kill somebody....He touched our conscience. He kept you alive with information; and he made you laugh, which was so powerful. I would say unequivocally that he influenced Davis and what he did with *Purlie Victorious*.³⁵³

More important, Gregory, who appeared on *The Jack Paar Show* often³⁵⁴ and received a massive amount of exposure in a short time, was instrumental in preparing the audience for *Purlie Victorious*.

Purlie Victorious: The Audience

Davis articulated the value of humor by African Americans in such a way that theatre audiences could inhabit a political and cultural space without the customary discomfort. In essence, Davis, dismantling the cultural resistance to race and race-related issues, engaged his audiences in reflective stocktaking as they were being exposed to a progressive social encounter:

When I see people, white and black, sit down side by side and laugh like hell at those ridiculous customs which still serve to keep us artificially separated, then I feel Purlie has done his job. For if men may really laugh together at something disturbing to them both it means that—for the moment—they have overleapt their separateness; and are—for the moment—free to behold the universe, with sorrow or with joy—from the same point of view.³⁵⁵

As his audiences became less insular and more exposed, they became more acculturated in the cultural capital of blackness. Davis understood that white audiences accepted his satire when they came to see it:

The theatre-going public, when it has taken the time to come and see, has usually been surprised and delighted that comedy—satire in particular—could be such an effective weapon against race prejudice; that a stereotype about Negro life, which would be offensive in the hands of a white writer,

³⁵³ Harry Belafonte, interview with author (August 5, 2010).

³⁵⁴ Gregory appeared on the *The Jack Paar Show* at least three times in 1961 (March 24, May 12, and June 5) before the opening of *Purlie Victorious*. It was also reported by Herb Lyon (*Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 1961) that Gregory was excused by the Playboy Club on a Monday night in February to do *The Jack Paar Show*.)

³⁵⁵ Ossie Davis, "Purlie Told Me," *Freedomways* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1962): 157.

might become in the hands of a Negro writer a totally unexpected revelation of true substance of Negro wit and humor.³⁵⁶

Davis, consciously or not, was engaged in the ongoing project of preparing white society for a significant transformation. While capturing the subversive spirit of blacks, Davis was particularly careful to skirt potential sociopolitical controversy. He handled his material (humor) so as not to offend or anger. Davis was not in the tradition of the angry or scathing white political satirists such as Mort Sahl or Lenny Bruce. He wished to promote interracial harmony, not foment antagonism. *Purlie Victorious*, in fact, avoided the violence that was prevalent in the South at the time.

Of course, there is a question as to how successfully these goals were realized in *Purlie Victorious*. The acerbic critic John Simon understood Davis's aims, but castigated the level of sophistication with which it was presented and received.

...the huge topic of integration and social justice is treated farcically, the spectators can, if their sense of humor is as sophomoric as their social awareness, see themselves as a liberating army marching on its belly laughs. Hence *Purlie Victorious* has been hailed with the subliterate encomia befitting another *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.³⁵⁷

But at a time when audiences might still see reruns of *Amos 'n' Andy* and other stereotypical servant characters, *Purlie Victorious* presented to white audiences "people of a different section, hemisphere, world, universe from Amos 'n' Andy, Stepin Fetchit and Uncle Remus."³⁵⁸ The intentions of the play were clear to former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who wrote that *Purlie Victorious* was:

Broad comedy but it makes its points by laughing at segregation, not at the people involved in it. Mixed with the humor there is intelligent, incisive commentary on segregation, discrimination, and the slow pace of integration. You can laugh at the usual clichés and wonder if they do not

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ John Simon, "Theatre Chronicle," *Hudson Review* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1961-1962): 586.

³⁵⁸ Sterling Brown, "A Century of Negro Portraiture in American Literature," *Massachusetts Review* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1966): 92.

border on some of the things which our colored citizens protest against. But in the end you realize that they never really conceal the play's sincere plea to find solutions free of bitterness.³⁵⁹

Purlie Victorious contributed to the integration of Broadway in a quite literal way. It was also responsible for bringing a significant black audience to the theatre. The cultural boom of the 1960s expanded audiences; Alvin Toffler suggested that it offered a democratization of the audience, that the arts were becoming more central to the lives of a larger pool of Americans.³⁶⁰ Stanley Kauffmann argued that the Manhattan theatre was unresponsive to the changing audience;³⁶¹ nonetheless, around the country there was enormous activity and growth in the arts, particularly an increase in audience size. Abbott Kaplan, who was the first chairman of the California Arts Commission and dean of University Extension at UCLA, stated while writing about the progress of the audience:

The audience for classical music, for serious theatre, for opera and ballet has always represented but a fraction of the total population. The fact is that this audience today, due to a much higher average educational level in the country (twice what it was 40 years ago), greater general affluence and increased leisure time, is far greater than it has ever been before and is proportionately much larger than the increase in population alone would warrant.³⁶²

Even Kauffmann had to admit that there was an upgrade in the audience:

The bulk of the audience—the middle class audience—is being upgraded. There is evidence to substantiate this from serious to less serious matters, from the founding of those regional theaters to the character of book-club choices, the increase in travel, the interest in high cuisine.³⁶³

The health and progress of the arts during the 1960s, which impacted measurably on the audience, were due in part to the growing numbers of arts groups, the increase in theatre

³⁵⁹ "Purlie Victorious," *Ebony* 17, no. 5 (March 1962): 55-56.

³⁶⁰ Alvin Toffler, *The Culture Consumers* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1965), 34.

³⁶¹ Stanley Kauffmann, "Significant Appointment," *New York Times*, February 20, 1966, X1.

³⁶² Abbott Kaplan, "The Culture Revolution—Is It More than Skip Deep?" *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1964, B1.

³⁶³ Kauffmann, "Significant Appointment," X1.

programs, the increase in regional theatres, the increase in arts councils around the country, and the emerging idea to move the arts from the periphery to the center of society. In essence, there was a renaissance in the arts during this period, and theatre benefited from this boom.

Economists William Baumol and William Bowen, in their landmark study, *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, noted that the cultural boom of the 1960s [the theatre boom of the 1960s will be discussed more fully in chapter 5] did not fully encompass all corners of society.

If there has been a significant rise in the size of audiences in recent years, it has certainly not yet encompassed the general public. If the sociological base of the audience has in fact expanded, it must surely have been incredibly narrow before the boom got under way. This result indicates also, in a large sense, that attempts to reach a wider and more representative audience, to interest the less educated or the less affluent, have so far had limited effects.³⁶⁴

While it is true that blacks constituted a very small percentage of arts audiences, blacks did, as was noted by Baumol and Bowen, attend in record numbers when “Negro themes and performers are presented.”³⁶⁵

Purlie Victorious is one of the civil rights plays that black audiences heavily attended. Speaking of Sylvester Leaks and John Henrik Clarke, who were employed to promote *Purlie Victorious*, Davis stated:

They went to churches, to lodges, to social clubs, labor unions. They took *Purlie* directly to the Negro community, and the Negro community got the message. It was, and is, the attendance of my own people at the box office that made the difference: it kept *Purlie* alive. Did this mean that a Negro work, with Negro content, could depend on the Negro community for support, and survive? I believe it did.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ William Baumol and William Bowen, *The Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 96.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

³⁶⁶ Davis, “Purlie Told Me,” 158.

Leaks and Clarke reported that within a period of four weeks, they sold more than 3,000 tickets to various black groups.³⁶⁷ Leaks asserted that “were it not for the Negro people’s support, *Purlie Victorious* would have closed a month after it opened. It is now in its seventh month.”³⁶⁸

With *Purlie Victorious*, Davis was after more than a comedy about black heroes and white villains; his ultimate goal was to have a positive impact on race relations. Hence, his task was to present blacks as well-adjusted human beings and not victims or symbols of oppression; simultaneously, he had to make whites feel better about their historical role in slavery. The theatre experience had to be a rich and educational experience for both whites and blacks.

Diversifying the audience was central to the goals of the Civil Rights Movement. Davis was aware that he was negotiating politics through laughter; at the same time he was supportive of integration, he was repudiating racism. In effect, Davis had become a cultural broker who was after community laughter. He was participating in the making of a national black humor while contributing to the multifaceted and complex process of racial politics. Davis was using humor to fight against the politics that portrayed blacks as irrelevant and invisible; his humor placed black attitudes alongside white attitudes. He wanted to play a role in shaping both national politics and public policy. With *Purlie Victorious*, Davis wanted black humor to become an active agency in the politics of race; he wanted his laughter to produce a homogeneous community. Civil Rights leaders and civil rights organizations were in need of *Purlie Victorious*.

Ossie Davis: Politicking Integration During the Civil Rights Movement

Eric Bentley argues that “What makes the politics of a play can be the precise moment at which it is performed and the precise place where it is performed.”³⁶⁹ This was true of *Purlie*

³⁶⁷ *Purlie Victorious* press release (November 13, 1961), John Henrik Clarke archive, Box 2, Folder 7, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Appendix 34, 320-321.

³⁶⁸ “Drama Mailbag [Sylvester Leaks, William Vines, George Metcalfe, Dorothy J. Harris],” *New York Times*, April 15, 1962, X3.

Victorious, which was performed on Broadway at a time when the Civil Rights Movement's dominant ideology of integration framed the grievances, strategies, and protests of the era. The significance of that ideology to the Movement was stated by Harold Cruse, who said unequivocally, "Overall, the Negro movement is guided by the integrationist forces: the philosophy of the NAACP, Urban League, CORE, Martin L. King in the Northern states and (chiefly) the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the Southern states (SNCC)."³⁷⁰ Cruse goes further to add that the "total philosophy" of many black-theatre luminaries during the early 1960s, from LeRoi Jones to Diana Sands, could be "summed up as prointegration."³⁷¹ Placing special emphasis on black performers, Cruse noted that "the theme of integration in the theatre is primarily an actor's and performer's plea."³⁷²

The political interactions between Davis, civil rights organizations, and integration are evident in *Purlie Victorious*. Davis was part of the movement and interorganizational strategies that promoted integration as the favored political ideology to solve racial problems.

Davis was adamant and steadfast in his prointegration stance. He understood that for integration to succeed, segregation had to be crushed. Commenting on the connections between segregation and the church, the theatre, and the courts [three entities whose roles are evident in *Purlie Victorious*], Davis emphasized how each offered political and cultural affinity for racial unity while putting forth resistance to segregation:

Our churches will say that segregation is immoral because it makes perfectly wonderful people, white and black, do immoral things. Our courts will say segregation is illegal because it makes perfectly wonderful people, white and black, do illegal things. And, finally, our theatre will say segregation is ridiculous because it makes perfectly wonderful people,

³⁶⁹ Eric Bentley, "Writing for Political Theatre," in "10th Anniversary Issues: The American Theatre Condition," *Performing Arts Journal* 9, no. 2/3 (1985): 50.

³⁷⁰ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: Quill, 1984), 202-203.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 525.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 526.

white and black, do ridiculous things. That was the point I had in writing the play and that was the point I hope I have gotten across.³⁷³

Davis continues, explaining his specific reason for writing *Purlie Victorious*:

I have a specific reason for writing a play like *Purlie Victorious* in the manner in which it was written. To me, my intent was to have a handbook of consolation, information and struggle, which my people and their friends could use to understand, explain the situation in which they found themselves and point the way toward a possible solution.³⁷⁴

For Davis, integration would solve the problems of black inequality. Thus, *Purlie Victorious* came into existence to help solve the race problem in America.

The integration aspect, although pervasive throughout *Purlie Victorious*, is most apparent with the final action of Charlie Cotchipee, who asks the pertinent question that summed up the politics of the play:

CHARLIE

(*To Purlie.*)

Would you let me be a member of your church?

MISSY

You?

GITLOW

Li'l Charlie Cotchipee!

LUTIEBELLE

A member of Big Bethel?

CHARLIE

May I? That is—that is, if you don't mind—as soon as you get it started?

PURLIE

Man, we're already started: the doors of Big Bethel, Church of the New Freedom for all Mankind, are hereby declared "Open for Business!"

GITLOW

Brother Pastor, I move we accept Brother Charlie Cotchipee as our first candidate for membership to Big Bethel on an integrated basis—

MISSY

I second that motion!

(*Purlie Victorious*, 184)

³⁷³ Ossie Davis, "The Wonderful World of Law and Order," in *Anger and Beyond: The Negro Writer in the United States*, ed. Herbert Hill (New York: Harper, 1966), 178.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

Clearly, the narrative arc of the play, and the emotional arc of the characters, was moving toward the goal of integration. Davis was helping in a significant way to dramatize, communicate, and orchestrate a collective quest for integration. In this, Helene Keyssar noted that Davis's play can be seen as part of a larger trend:

Many works of the 1960s, including Baraka's *The Toilet*, James Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, Charles Gordone's *No Place to Be Somebody*, and Ossie Davis's *Purlie Victorious*, though ostensibly and sometimes resoundingly different in tone, content, and strategy from each other and plays of the 1950s, nevertheless can be at least basically contained within a genre identifiable by its attempts to persuade audiences to accept, understand, or approve racial integration.³⁷⁵

But of the numerous integrationist plays of that era, *Purlie Victorious* is the one that most emphatically advocated for integration.

Using his celebrity status to dramatize integration and politicize the goals of the Civil Rights Movement, Davis, who played the role of Purlie Victorious Judson in the original production, occupied the space Howard Becker recognized as that of a moral entrepreneur. Becker, expounding on Label Theory, describes the moral entrepreneur as the individual whose role is to take the initiative to crusade for something that is right for society, or to discontinue something that he has determined is wrong for society.³⁷⁶

That role, combined with a Whitmanesque position, made Davis's reliance on the church a logical choice as a dramatic motif to foster cooperative understanding. The church was an essential component of the Civil Rights Movement; the values of Christian teachings helped considerably to shape its ethos. Julius Lester argued, "While the Civil Rights Movement was responsible for significant social change, it was, at heart, a religious movement."³⁷⁷ Given the role of religion in the traditional black community, Davis intuitively understood that black

³⁷⁵ Helene Keyssar, *The Curtain and the Veil: Strategies in Black Drama* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1981), 11-12.

³⁷⁶ Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1963), 147-163.

³⁷⁷ Julius Lester, "God and Social Change," *Crosscurrents* 56, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 304.

audiences would not have difficulty responding to the centripetal pull of black religious homiletics. The homily in this instance endorsed Christian fellowship as being in agreement with the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, when Charlie, a white Southerner with a staunch segregationist father, asked to join a black church, Purlie's (Davis's) acceptance offered a symbol for a major change while honoring Whitman's tenet for brotherhood.

In the exact entrepreneurial spirit that embodied his political certitude, Davis decided on his role as a preacher to convince audiences of the cultural and political imperatives of integration. It would be a mistake not to consider the significant role of the black preacher, who is not an entrepreneurial invention but rather an inveterate cultural signifier who served a central function in black struggles. C. Eric Lincoln indicated in the foreword to the book *Black Preaching*:

The black preacher has always enjoyed the status of being the natural leader of the black community. His leadership role has at times assumed a variety of forms with concomitant responsibilities: pastor or spiritual leader, political leader, social leader, and very often the leading proponent and exemplar of education.³⁷⁸

In *Purlie Victorious*, the preacher (Purlie) is true to the tradition of actual black preachers. Purlie assumes many roles, from self-made minister to leader of the Negro people to professor of Negro philosophy.

As a preacher, Purlie is endowed with a requisite moral authority, which he relies on to promote the legitimacy of integration among his congregants. Davis did not stop at Purlie's congregation; he wanted his integration ideology to stay with audience members after they left the theatre. With a rousing dramatic epilogue, which served as the denouement, Davis communicated his political message of integration under the guise of togetherness:

PURLIE

And toll the bell, Big Bethel! Dearly beloved, recently bereaved, and friends, we welcome you to Big Bethel, Church of the New Freedom: part

³⁷⁸ C. Eric Lincoln, foreword to *Black Preaching*, by H. H. Mitchell (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970), 6.

Baptist; part Methodist; part Catholic—with the merriness of Christmas and the happiness of Hanukkah; and to the first integrated funeral in the sovereign, segregated state of Georgia. Let there be no merriments in these buryments! Though you are dead, Ol' Cap'n, and in hell, I suspect—as post-mortal guest of honor, at our expense: it is not too late to repent.
(*Purlie Victorious*, 185)

The syncretic blend of the myriad religious denominations, along with an integrated funeral in the segregated state of Georgia, embraced a rhetorical inclusiveness that honored the temporality of integration. Carlson declared, “In its ideal state, the theatre serves as an arena for public reform, where its spectators regain their imaginative powers and thus their credentials for statesmanship.”³⁷⁹

It was Davis's contention that theatre, as a vital force of the cognitive praxis of the Movement, would serve as a resource in the transformation of political and cultural milieus through its advocacy of integration. Anticipating that audiences would participate in the political transformative process, Davis offered *Purlie Victorious* as a theatre-vehicle to politicize them. They would use their imaginative faculties to become conscious of integration.

Conclusion

Although the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1962 went to *How to Succeed in Business without Really Trying*, *Purlie Victorious* received an honorable mention from Pulitzer judge John Mason Brown the same year. While the play was not Brown's first choice, he considered it a major contender:

I have an alternate recommendation, which I advance with warmth but not quite the same wholehearted enthusiasm. This is Ossie Davis's *Purlie Victorious*, which is a sunny and richly funny satire of all the Southern stereotypes—the mustached Colonel, the subservient Uncle Tom, the colored Mammy, etc. The play has a fine folk quality and at times an exuberance of spirit, which makes you think of a Negro *Playboy of the Western World*. It is no angry propaganda play. Chuckles are its

³⁷⁹ Julie Carlson, “An Active Imagination: Coleridge and the Politics of Dramatic Reform,” *Modern Philology* 86, no. 1 (August 1988): 33.

expressions of protest, laughs its weapons of correction. It abounds in such lines as “Being colored can be a lot of fun when there ain’t nobody lookin’.” Mr. Davis, a fine actor, is also a capable playwright. If you should decide against *How to Succeed* (as I hope you won’t), I would be happy for many reasons to have you choose *Purlie Victorious*.³⁸⁰

Despite the somewhat patronizing tone, this was an indication that black dramatists were moving out of the margins and into the mainstream.

Purlie Victorious possessed a distinct quality that was reflective of an emerging social change, a change endorsed by civil rights leaders and organizations. Of the many civil rights groups that offered their support to *Purlie Victorious*, one that particularly merits mention was the NAACP. Executive Director Roy Wilkins sent out a letter to all the chapters, encouraging members to go see the play:

If you have not already seen the new Broadway play, *Purlie Victorious*, I urge that you see it soon. Ossie Davis, one of the best-known Negro actors, and his talented wife, Ruby Dee, head the mixed cast of a comedy which slips over many a truth under the cover of “real sharp” laugh lines.³⁸¹

Wilkins acknowledged that the play succeeded through its humor. Undoubtedly, he was aware of the embedded message of integration.

By imbuing his comedy with the dominating ethos of integration [coupled with his celebrity status, moral authority, and commitment to activism], Davis was a prime theatre-artist for civil rights organizations. He did not hesitate to enlist his art and his name for the Movement’s cause. Davis and Arthur Miller died within a week of each other and as one critic noted, “Davis and Miller were among our last living connections to a style of cultural politics that was not pop or academic, but was rooted in the lived experiences and struggle of ordinary people.”³⁸² Former president Bill Clinton stated, “talking to Ossie Davis made me want to stand up a little

³⁸⁰ John Mason Brown to Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board. Appendix 35, 322-323.

³⁸¹ Roy Wilkins to chapters of NAACP. Appendix 36, 324.

³⁸² Danny Duncan Collum, “Finding a Cultural Politics,” *Sojourners* 34, no. 5 (May 2005): 31.

straighter, speak a little better, and be a little more generous,”³⁸³ and even declared, “The man who chose to be a writer, actor, and champion for civil rights would have made a fine president.”³⁸⁴

Davis, no doubt, would have made a “fine president,” but he would have kept humor in the mix:

PURLIE

We still need togetherness; we still need otherness—with faith in the future-ness of our cause. Let us, therefore, stifle the rifle of conflict, shatter the scatter of discord, smuggle the struggle, tickle the pickle, and grapple the apple of peace.

(*Purlie Victorious*, 185)

³⁸³ Sylvia Hairston, “Farewell to Actor Ossie Davis,” *New Voice of New York* (Harlem), February 17, 2005, 2.

³⁸⁴ Vinette K. Pryce, “Davis Receives Harlem State Send-off,” *New Beacon, New York*, February 17, 2005, 27.

Chapter Four:

Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*: Fitting Its Revolutionary Politics in the Civil Rights Movement

The decade of the 1960s has been widely associated with radicalism, political activism, social turbulence, and cultural progressivity.³⁸⁵ Dance historian Sally Banes cites 1963 as the most adventurous political year of that period and also as the year that defines the *élan vital* of the 1960s.³⁸⁶ In terms of civil rights, however, a case could be made that 1964 is the pivotal year. It signaled a transformation in race relations, as the notion that connected racial equality to integration came under attack from African-American spokespersons who advocated a racial pride that had its foundation in the concept of black power. Adam Clayton Powell, a congressman at the time, stated: “Black power symbolized a new militancy that had caught the imagination of young Negroes that established Negro leaders could not control... and the country would have to deal with it as best it could.”³⁸⁷ The black power premise--a Black Nationalist ideology--also encompassed the literary and artistic counterpart Black Arts Movement while sustaining a black ethnic subculture whose goals, according to Stokely Carmichael, were to “develop the black community as a functional and honorable segment of the total society, with its own cultural identity, life patterns, and institutions.”³⁸⁸ With the ever-increasing distinct Black Nationalist agenda, there began a shift away from the discourse of Martin Luther King Jr. and other moderate civil rights leaders--those who endorsed integration, nonviolence, and civil disobedience--to the more radical Malcolm X, who energized and invigorated a Black Nationalist politics while endorsing separation of blacks and whites, self-

³⁸⁵ See for instance: Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987) and Fredric Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s,” in “The 60’s Without Apology,” *Social Text*, no. 9/10 (Spring-Summer 1984): 178-209.

³⁸⁶ Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village, 1963: Avant-garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 1.

³⁸⁷ John Herbers, “Rights Backers Fear a Backlash,” *New York Times*, September 21, 1966, 33.

³⁸⁸ Stokely Carmichael, “Toward Black Liberation,” *Massachusetts Review* 7, no. 4 (1966): 647. For more about the politics and aesthetic of Black Power, see: Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

defense, and the use of violence when necessary.³⁸⁹ In the words of historian Hugh Wilford, Malcolm X “preached a doctrine of racial separatism and dared to criticize the nonviolent tactics of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.”³⁹⁰ Malcolm X charged that the politics of moderate black leaders had accomplished little for blacks³⁹¹ while specifically arguing that the black leaders “have sold themselves out and become campaign managers in the Negro community for Lyndon Johnson.”³⁹² Therefore, the transformation from the politics of King to the politics of Malcolm X was prominent, widespread, and radical. Taylor Branch commented that the transformation was an “extraordinary one in which the entire society shifted from “Negro” to “black” almost overnight.”³⁹³

Black Power was not only an alternative to integration; more significant was its advocacy, interpretation, reinforcement, and validation of the doctrine of racial solidarity and racial pride. Malcolm X emphasized, “We must recapture our heritage and our identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of white supremacy.”³⁹⁴ On the other hand, recognizing a major criticism of integration was that its very foundation implied the superiority of everything white and the inferiority of everything black. Blacks sought access into white neighborhoods, white schools, white culture, and white values while simultaneously denying their own racial identity and heritage. As the militant advocates of black power started to gain ascendancy, King likewise acknowledged that too many blacks rejected their heritage, were ashamed of their color, were ashamed of their art and music, and subscribed to standards of white society.³⁹⁵

³⁸⁹ Malcolm X commented on integration, stating: “My contention is that *America* is against integration. But they’re hypocrites. They pose as being for integration while they practice segregation.” [Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 256.]

³⁹⁰ Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 215.

³⁹¹ “Negro Moderation Decried by Malcolm X in Lebanon,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1964, 56.

³⁹² R. W. Apple Jr., “Negro Leaders Split over Call to Cultural Drive,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1964, 11.

³⁹³ Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), xii.

³⁹⁴ From the OAAU’s Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives, cited in John Henrik Clarke, *Malcolm X: The Man and His Times* (Toronto, ON: 1969), 341. The Organization of Afro-American Unity was an organization Malcolm X formed.

³⁹⁵ Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Beacon, 1966), 57.

While the emerging radical politics of Black Power, which accorded with the growing dissatisfaction of many African Americans, has been well documented,³⁹⁶ the cultural characteristics--more specifically, black cultural nationalism--have not received sufficient attention. The new aesthetic, submerged in the cultural and political articulation of liberation, became the ideological foundation of African-American artists, particularly those connected to the theatre. One of the key purposes here is to explore how a new artistic aesthetic invaded the politics of the Civil Rights Movement to articulate and frame the complex interaction of black cultural consciousness and its associative connections to an extensive liberation struggle.

Just as the explosive politics of the 1960s transformed American society, it also transformed the American stage.³⁹⁷ The dramatic transformation and the countercultural characteristics of theatre during that decade are well documented. David Crespy,³⁹⁸ Stephen Bottoms,³⁹⁹ Roy Kotynek, and John Cohassey⁴⁰⁰ are some of those who described how theatre visionaries (particularly the playwrights and directors) created and produced innovative methods and ideas that helped establish a new aesthetic.

Al Carmines (Judson Poets' Theater), Joseph Cino (Caffe Cino), Judith Malina and Julian Beck (The Living Theatre), Manny Roth (CAFÉ WHA?), Ralph Cook (Theatre Genesis), Ellen Stewart (La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club), and playwrights, including Lanford Wilson, Sam Shepard, Edward Albee, and Jean-Claude van Itallie, were all at the forefront of this

³⁹⁶ Coleste Michelle Condit and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-African World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), 191-193. For more information on the shift to a more radical politics, see: Robert Terrill, "Protest, Prophecy, and Prudence in the Rhetoric of Malcolm X," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 25-53, or Akinyele O. Umoja, "The Ballot and the Bullet," *Journal of Black Studies* 29 (1999): 558-78. See also: Akinyele K. Umoja, "1964: The Beginning of the End of Nonviolence in the Mississippi Freedom Movement," *Radical History Review* 85 (Winter 2003): 201-226, who makes the same argument about 1964 that I put forth here.

³⁹⁷ Arnold Aronson argues that the political and cultural forces united in the 1960s to produce an explosion in the arts. See his review of Stephen J. Bottoms's book, *Playing Underground: A Critical History of the 1960s Off-Off-Broadway Movement*, in *Modern Drama* 48, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 611-613.

³⁹⁸ David Allison Crespy, *Off-Off-Broadway Explosion: How Provocative Playwrights of the 1960s Ignited a New American Theater* (New York: Back Stage Books, 2003).

³⁹⁹ Bottoms, *Playing Underground*.

⁴⁰⁰ Roy Kotynek and John Cohassey, *American Cultural Rebels: Avant-Garde and Bohemian Artists, Writers, and Musicians from the 1850s Through the 1960s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

ground-breaking theatrical venture. A new wave of European dramatists, including Harold Pinter, Samuel Beckett,⁴⁰¹ Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet, also played a key role in the 1960s theatre explosion. It was during this period that the theories of Bertolt Brecht and Antonin Artaud became a major factor in American theatre. In the midst of this, there is one notable theatre figure whose politics and activism not only connected him to the prevalent avant-garde⁴⁰² experimentalism of the time but also connected him to the new black consciousness and Black Nationalist politics and that is LeRoi Jones (aka Amiri Baraka).⁴⁰³ By spanning both politics and art, Baraka emerged as a central figure in both spheres. Therefore, this essay, while situating Baraka within the revolutionary movements of the 1960s, contextualizes his reliance on a cultural product (theatre) to engage politics and culture in a synergetic way while simultaneously revealing the anxiety and discomfort that pervaded the Civil Rights Movement.

Looking back on the period in his article *The Revolutionary Tradition in Black Drama*, Errol Hill notes that black revolutionary drama “conjures up visions of the 1960s and 1970s when there erupted on the American theatrical scene a type of play that was allied to and inspired the

⁴⁰¹ [Beckett’s *Play* was one of the three short dramas with Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman* performed at the Cherry Lane Theatre. Fernando Arrabal’s *The Two Executioners* was the other.] See: Howard Taubman, “Theatre: *Dutchman*,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1964, 46.

⁴⁰² Harold Cruse states that Baraka was “a devotee of avant-garde expression.” See Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: William Morrow, 1967).

⁴⁰³ There is a great deal of confusion about Jones’s name. Everett LeRoi Jones did not adopt the name Imamu Ameer Baraka until 1967. He later changed it to Amiri Baraka. Although the name change occurred years after the opening of *Dutchman*, Baraka will be used here rather than Jones to avoid confusion and to maintain consistency. David L. Smith has provided a bibliographical guide to the change of name. Therefore, it is worth providing his footnote in its entirety: “The precise history of Baraka’s name change is rather confusing, and the account provided in his recent autobiography further muddles the situation rather than clarifying it. Indeed, he does not even acknowledge ever having called himself Imamu—one of the many deviations from the fact in that strange chronicle of his first forty years. See *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (New York: Freundlich, 1984), 267. For other versions, see Kimberly W. Benston, *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), xviii-xix. Werner Sollors provides an account given by Baraka in 1974, along with a listing of Baraka’s various other pseudonyms, in *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a Populist Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 263n. Theodore Hudson’s doctoral dissertation, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka* (Howard University, 1971), remains a valuable source of biographical information, especially in contrast to Baraka’s highly fictionalized autobiography. Don N. Menchise, ‘LeRoi Jones and a Case of Shifting Identities,’ *College Language Association Journal* 20 (December 1976): 61, is one example of the sort of reaction that Baraka’s name changing provoked.” The above citation is from “Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts of Black Art,” *Boundary 2*, 15, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1986-Winter 1987): 252-253.

black liberation movement of those momentous years.”⁴⁰⁴ Among such revolutionary dramas, Baraka’s *Dutchman* occupies the most significant space. It was the central play by a black playwright of the period that offered a militant rhetoric and radical politics. At roughly the same time that Baraka was shaking up Off-Broadway, James Baldwin’s *Blues for Mister Charlie* was disturbing white audiences on Broadway. One critic asserted that *Blues for Mister Charlie* was “an angry sermon and a pain-wracked lament,”⁴⁰⁵ while another critic went directly to the point, arguing that *Blues for Mister Charlie* “is the most controversial play on the racial problem ever presented on Broadway. Audiences are never passive and there isn’t anyone who leaves the theatre with a neutral feeling. At the final curtain, audiences scream and yell ‘bravo,’ or else they hiss and boo, but they do not leave complacently.”⁴⁰⁶ While the deep anger and emotion may have been similar in those two plays, they were stylistically very different. Unlike Lorraine Hansberry and other moderate black playwrights of the 1950s, black playwrights of the 1960s offered a more progressive politics in their dramas. Baldwin and Baraka emphasized dramas with a type of militancy--a willingness of black characters to challenge white authority. Clearly, that attitude is in Baldwin’s *Blues for Mister Charlie* and Baraka’s *Dutchman*; both plays are of the same political sensibility. Stylistically, however, Baldwin’s play embraces a traditional naturalism while revealing the racial position of a white town and its politics in opposition to a black town. In contrast, Baraka relies on the trappings of Expressionism to dramatize the tragic death of his main character, who decides to stand up for his manhood. Ernst Toller, a leading German dramatist known for his association with Expressionism, states:

In style, Expressionism was always pregnant, almost telegraphic,
always shunning the peripheral and always probing to the center of

⁴⁰⁴ Errol Hill, “The Revolutionary Tradition in Black Drama,” in “Theatre of Color,” *Theatre Journal* 38, no. 4 (December 1986): 408.

⁴⁰⁵ Howard Taubman, “Common Burden,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1964, X1.

⁴⁰⁶ Jesse Walker, “The Big Controversy over Blues for Mr. Charlie,” *New York Amsterdam News*, June 6, 1964, 17.

things. In expressionistic drama man is no accidental private person. He is a type posited for many and ignoring the limits of superficial characterizations.⁴⁰⁷

There is no doubt that the 1960s witnessed the emergence of many angry black playwrights, whose politics were to advance revolutionary agendas while provoking confrontations. Given the proliferation of black theatre companies (Negro Ensemble Company, National Black Theatre, Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School, New Heritage Theatre, Black Theatre Alliance, Free Southern Theater, Spirit House, and others), the messages of angry politics were reaching more audiences, white and black.

Dutchman was a landmark production in shifting the political agenda. Baraka did not care about the critical reception of whites; *Dutchman* would function in the theatre on its own terms. *Dutchman* did shock many members of the various audiences; more important, it destroyed barriers and broke new ground on so many levels--a point acknowledged by Harold Cruse, who argued that *Dutchman* ventured away from, what he called, "glorified soap opera about domestic conformity."⁴⁰⁸

Dutchman was performed at the Cherry Lane Theatre, one of the most venerable Off-Broadway theatres, primarily for a white audience. Arnold Aronson states that "A true avant-garde theatre must seek an essential change in audience perceptions that, in turn, will have a profound impact on the relationship of the spectator to the world."⁴⁰⁹ This is exactly what Baraka's drama sought to do. While the Off-Broadway audience may have been more politically liberal than its uptown counterpart, and even though the Cherry Lane had been home to some radical plays, the audience was still unprepared for a revolutionary dramatic effort by this black playwright.

⁴⁰⁷ Ernst Toller, "Post-War German Drama," *Nation* 127 (November 7, 1928): 488.

⁴⁰⁸ Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 69.

⁴⁰⁹ Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-garde Theatre: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), xx.

This chapter will examine how Baraka and his play *Dutchman* fit within the emerging militancy announced by Malcolm X,⁴¹⁰ and changed the landscape of political activity while advocating a black consciousness. *Dutchman* was not merely radical theatre; like Baraka himself, the play was committed to effecting urgent change in the racial situation and climate. It was both symptomatic and anticipatory of what would happen in the sphere of black cultural production.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Baraka was an emerging black artist in New York's Greenwich Village environment--largely associated with the Beat poets. *Dutchman* arrived and elicited diametrically opposite critical responses. Some praised him as a "promising, unsettling talent"⁴¹¹ or labeled him a "writer possessed of a fierce and blazing talent"⁴¹² and "an original and talented young dramatist."⁴¹³ Others considered him a "demagogue"⁴¹⁴ and a "dangerous nuisance."⁴¹⁵ He was also called one of the "angriest writers to storm the theatre."⁴¹⁶ Despite the critics' differences, scholars later recognized Baraka "as the leading black playwright of the decade."⁴¹⁷ Arnold Rampersad, who has written biographies of Langston Hughes and Ralph Ellison, argues that Baraka is among the eight literary African-American giants "who have significantly affected the course of African-American literary culture."⁴¹⁸ The other seven are Phyllis Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison.

⁴¹⁰ M. S. Handler, "Malcolm X Sees Rise in Violence," *New York Times*, March 13, 1964, 20.

⁴¹¹ Taubman, "Theatre: *Dutchman*," 46.

⁴¹² John Gruen, "Blistering Light on Conflict," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 25, 1964, 15.

⁴¹³ Edith Oliver, "Off Broadway: Over the Edge," *New Yorker*, April 4, 1964, 79.

⁴¹⁴ George Dennison, "The Demagoguery of Le Roi Jones," *Commentary* 39, no. 2 (February 1965): 68.

⁴¹⁵ Stanley Kauffmann, "LeRoi Jones and the Tradition of the Fake," *Dissent* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1965): 211.

⁴¹⁶ Howard Taubman, "Playwright Uses Shock Treatment," *Chicago Tribune*, December 18, 1964, B18.

⁴¹⁷ Sandra L. Richards, "Negative Forces and Positive Non-Entities: Images of Women in the Dramas of Amiri Baraka," in "Insurgency in American Theatre," *Theatre Journal* 34, no. 2 (May 1982): 233.

⁴¹⁸ Arnold Rampersad, review of *Amiri Baraka / LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism,"* by Werner Sollors, *American Book Review* 2, no. 3 (February 1980).

Considering that Baraka worked in a wide array of literary genres (not to mention his political activism), his influence on other black artists is immense. August Wilson widely acknowledged Baraka's influence,⁴¹⁹ stating that he had been influenced by the four Bs: Romare Bearden, Amiri Baraka, Jorge Luis Borges, and the blues.⁴²⁰ Black playwrights Ed Bullins, Ben Caldwell, and Gilbert Moses began writing plays during the mid-to-late 1960s and Baraka's influence is undeniable. One critic, writing about Ed Bullins, noted:

It is not surprising that--as in a forerunner like LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman*--the newer black playwrights often use the theater as a harsh laboratory for separating inherent and improved self-images. Mr. Bullins, who has worked with Mr. Jones, seems to be making this sort of analytical effort even while his characters distract the audience with overt sexual gestures and torrents of obscenity.⁴²¹

Another critic links playwright Houston Bass's *The Fun House* to Baraka:

There are echoes of other plays...there are the kind of shock obscenities used by LeRoi Jones and occasionally the relationship between white queen and black king comes achingly close to the kind of things Jones did in *Dutchman*.⁴²²

In 1969, critic Clive Barnes noted that "the new black playwrights are writing for the blacks, and whites overhear them (at their own emotional and intellectual perils)." Black drama, he continued, "is more angry, more demanding, more committed and in a perverse way both more hysterical and yet also more articulate."⁴²³ Both statements encompass the influence and essence of Baraka, his politics and his writing. Thus, Baraka's influence, particularly during this political period, is significant.⁴²⁴ He certainly inspired succeeding black dramatists to be more daring

⁴¹⁹ See Wilson's speech *The Ground on Which I Stand*, delivered in 1996 at Theatre Communications Group National Conference. *Callaloo* 20, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 493.

⁴²⁰ Patricia M. Gantt, "Putting Black Culture on Stage: August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle," *College Literature* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 6.

⁴²¹ Roderick Nordell, "Bullins and Black Theatre," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 4, 1969, 11.

⁴²² Malcolm L. Johnson, "Audience Goes Wild over Long Wharf Play," *Hartford Courant*, September 13, 1968, 12.

⁴²³ Clive Barnes, "Black Theater: Of Politics and Passion," *New York Times*, September 22, 1969, 36.

⁴²⁴ Many black dramatists influenced by Baraka are not known or remembered. They had productions but never garnered the recognition that *Dutchman* earned. For examples, the following are playwrights who surely were influenced by Baraka but are

with politics and experimentation while challenging white hegemony. Baraka earned the reputation of being the “most militant, the most revolutionary, the most explosive and the most controversial playwright on the American scene.”⁴²⁵ He was branded an *enfant terrible*.⁴²⁶

Baraka: *Enfant Terrible*

When Baraka moved to the East Village in the late 1950s, he was exposed to many who challenged the conventional social, political, and cultural order. He hung out with avant-garde, experimental writers, musicians, painters, and poets: Frank O’Hara, Joel Oppenheimer, Thelonius Monk, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, Ornette Coleman, Charles Olson, Gil Sorrentino, Allen Ginsberg, and A. B. Spellman, who was a friend at Howard University. Harold Cruse considered Baraka one of Kerouac’s protégés,⁴²⁷ he was very much part of the East Village Bohemian culture.⁴²⁸ The culture of the East Village was characterized by a nonconformity that allowed Baraka to discover his unique ideological perspective. During this time, he worked on several publishing and editing projects. In 1958, Baraka published his first play, *A Good Girl Is Hard to Find*, which was included in his first volume of published poems, *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note* (1961). In 1958, he and Hettie Cohen, his future wife, started the literary magazine *Yugen*, where they published the works of many literary avant-gardists. After visiting Cuba in 1960,⁴²⁹ Baraka returned more committed than ever to becoming a writer. Baraka admitted that Cuba was a turning point for him:

rarely connected to him. Some of the plays with Baraka’s cultural and revolutionary/ nationalism spirit: Ron Milner’s *Who’s Got His Own*, Sonia Sanchez’s *The Bronx Is Burning*, and Jimmy Garrett’s *We Own the Night*.

⁴²⁵ Louis Phillips, “LeRoi Jones and Contemporary Black Drama,” in *The Black American Writer: Poetry and Drama*, vol. 2, ed. C. W. E. Bigsby (Deland, FL: Everett/Edwards, 1969).

⁴²⁶ Hollie I. West, “The Intellectual Odyssey of Amiri Baraka,” *Washington Post*, April 9, 1978, H1.

⁴²⁷ Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 274.

⁴²⁸ While there is a great deal written about Baraka’s transformation to the black militant, very little is about his presence as a solid integrationist. For example, Baraka’s first Harlem organization, On Guard for Freedom Committee, was an interracial group. He also had an interracial downtown group, Organization of Young Men. Point of fact, when some blacks objected to whites being in the Harlem group, Baraka is the one who disagreed with them and argued for whites to be included. For more on this, see “The Intellectuals and Force and Violence” in Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 347-381.

⁴²⁹ For more about Baraka’s trip to Cuba, see Cruse’s assessment of the trip. He was actually on the trip with Baraka and others. Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 347-381.

Well, the Cuba thing was the trigger for all of that. The Africa thing had been developed previous to that, but the Cuba thing popped the whole thing open, because once I went there and then got the whole feeling of the whole international correspondence, of motives and actions and ideologies, I was changed, you know? In a deep way. Because I had been inherently trying to get political, but that was the stroke, because it showed me that there was a whole world that was in motion. That opened that up, and then that magazine, the *African Revolution*, comes out about that time.... Martin Luther King, Malcolm X's appearance, Fidel Castro, you know, the Lumumba thing, all that . . . [Taps on table quickly.] And then the Kennedy thing, and a minute later, Malcolm—I mean, that's a hell of a period. I mean, that's like a series of explosions.⁴³⁰

In 1961, Baraka and poet Diane di Prima started an experimental group, the American Theatre for Poets; they also co-edited the literary magazine *Floating Bear*. He was also busy producing jazz concerts and writing about jazz. In 1963, Baraka's seminal study of black culture and black music, *Blues People: The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed from It*,⁴³¹ was published. Eric Drott argued that Baraka's jazz writing had an immense impact on a generation of jazz critics and intellectuals in France at the end of the 1960s.⁴³² He would subsequently write literary criticism and political and personal essays. Thus, before the arrival of *Dutchman* in 1964, Baraka had an ever-increasing literary reputation. 1964 was a pivotal year for Baraka. In addition to *Dutchman*, his plays *The Toilet*, *The Slave*, and *The Baptism* were all produced. This was followed in 1965 by a novel, *The System of Dante's Hell* (1965), and *Tales* (1967), a collection of short stories. In 1966, *Dutchman* was made into a film, directed by Anthony Harvey and starring Shirley Knight and Al Freeman Jr.

Baraka's writings, statements, and actions were almost always controversial---often contradicting his own earlier views. The writings are filled with denunciations, reevaluations,

⁴³⁰ Van Gosse, "Home Rules: An Interview with Amiri Baraka," *Radical History* 87 (2003): 115.

⁴³¹ *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* is still considered a vital study of African-American music.

⁴³² Eric Drott, "Free Jazz and the French Critic," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 61, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 541-81.

condemnations, regrets, repudiations, discarded identities, and renunciations. For example, at a panel discussion at the jazz club the Village Vanguard in 1965, he indicted the white audience for its racial injustice to blacks while musician Archie Shepp offered his castigation of murdered white civil rights workers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman.⁴³³ Baraka later apologized for his own callous statements about the murder of Schwerner and Goodman.⁴³⁴ He had a harsh exchange with Philip Roth;⁴³⁵ he called poet Robert Hayden a traitor to his race;⁴³⁶ he denounced other black dramatists.⁴³⁷ He originally supported Black Nationalism before renouncing it.⁴³⁸ There is also his attack on homosexuals;⁴³⁹ and in 2002, as poet laureate of New Jersey, he wrote

⁴³³ Harry Gilroy, "Racial Debate Displaces Jazz Program," *New York Times*, February 10, 1965, 47. [After Schwerner and Goodman were murdered in Mississippi (along with black civil rights worker James Chaney), Baraka angered many when he refused to honor the two slain whites. He derided their sacrifice and victim-status when he referred to them as "artifacts" and "paintings on the wall."]

⁴³⁴ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 285. To make sure his meaning was clear, Baraka added, "Those white boys were only seeking to assuage their own leaking consciences." Later regretting the crude and insensitive remarks, Baraka offered, "I was confusing Schwerner and Goodman with the young white poseur-liberals who sashayed safely through the streets of Greenwich Village, the behind-the-lines bleeding hearts. When, on the real side, if I could have stood some hard truth, Schwerner and Goodman were out there on the front lines doing more than I was!"

⁴³⁵ LeRoi Jones, "Reply to Philip Roth," *New York Review of Books*, July 9, 1964, 23.

Philip Roth's review of *Dutchman* produced an acrimonious exchange between the two, where Baraka fought back:

It is not my fault that you are so feeble-minded you refuse to see any Negro as a man, but rather as the narrow product of your own sterile response. You cannot categorize men. If my character is, as you say, "not Negro enough,"... then that would mean you have a definition of what Negroes are.

Philip Roth, "Reply to LeRoi Jones," *New York Review of Books*, July 9, 1964, 23.

Though charity might lead me to suggest that some clumsiness in my review caused you to misconstrue my meaning, the rhetoric and reasoning of your letter are sufficient to overwhelm any great flow of generous feelings in me. But then you would make it especially hard for anyone, I think, to trust very far your powers of analysis, literary or otherwise, when you warn emphatically in a first paragraph, "You cannot categorize men," only to rush on in a second to speak of "the main rot" in the minds of "academic" liberals like yourself.

⁴³⁶ Sara Love, "Dodging the Traps of Cultural Authenticity: A Review of Richard Ford's *Racial Culture: A Critique*," *Berkeley Journal of African-American Law & Policy* 8, no. 1 (2006): 156. At Fisk University's black writers' conference in 1966, Baraka was among a group of Black Nationalists who verbally attacked Robert Hayden, the first African-American poet laureate and the leading African-American poet during the Civil Rights Movement era. Hayden was called a traitor to his race, Uncle Tom, and Oreo. "The loudest and most popular voices of this particular discourse--Baraka, Don Lee (Haki Madhubuti), Larry Neal, Ron Karenga--publicly chastised Hayden and essentially banished him from the category of blackness." Also, see: Amiri Baraka, "Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion," *Washington Post*, November 16, 1986, F1. Baraka condemned or denounced many important black dramatists; among them are Douglas Turner Ward (one of the founders of the Negro Ensemble Company), Charles Gordone (the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize in drama), Charles Fuller (the second African-American Pulitzer Prize winner in drama), and Lorraine Hansberry (who wrote the seminal Civil Rights Movement drama). He did lament his denunciation of Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1986.

⁴³⁷ Baraka, "Raisin in the Sun's Enduring Passion," F1.

⁴³⁸ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*, 7. [In the early part of his career, Baraka's political agenda was under the umbrella of black cultural nationalism.]

⁴³⁹ Marlon B. Ross, "Camping the Dirty Dozens: The Queer Resources of Black Nationalist Invective," in "Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender: Literature and Culture," *Callaloo* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 291. [Ross noted, "Amiri Baraka and other

an anti-Semitic poem about 9/11.⁴⁴⁰ As David Smith has noted, “Baraka’s career has been a persistent chronicle of controversies, most of them having been provoked by Baraka’s own deliberately incendiary polemics.”⁴⁴¹

In 1965, Baraka left his Jewish wife, Hettie, and their two daughters and relocated from Greenwich Village to Harlem.⁴⁴² There, he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BART/S), where he directed his energy to community-based issues. After the death of Malcolm X, Baraka ensured that his political views would remain relevant via BART/S. Komozi Woodard stated that Baraka enacted Malcolm X’s beliefs in “the priority of black cultural revolution, the centrality of the African Revolution, and the necessity of developing a black ideology of self-determination.”⁴⁴³

The fundamental aim of BART/S, located in a brownstone on West 130th Street with an auditorium seating 120,⁴⁴⁴ was to bring theatre to the black community. But it was also a

black cultural nationalists sling heterosexist (and sexist) lines as though homosexuals (and implicitly women) were the enemy.] See also: José Esteban Muñoz, “Cruising the Toilet: LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2/3 (2007): 364. [While Baraka had a history of being harsh on homosexuals, that also changed. The change occurred before the murder of his daughter, but afterwards the change became more apparent: “On August 12, 2003, one of his daughters, Shani Baraka, and her female lover, Rayshon Holmes, were killed by the estranged husband of Wanda Pasha, who is also one of Baraka’s daughters. The thirty-one- and thirty-year-old women’s murders were preceded a few months earlier by another hate crime in Newark, the killing of fifteen-year-old Sakia Gunn. Gunn was a black transgendered youth who traveled from Hoboken to Greenwich Village and the Christopher Street piers to hang out with other young queers of color. Baraka and his wife, Amina, have in part dealt with the tragic loss of their daughter by turning to activism. The violent fate of their child has alerted them to the systemic violence that faces queer people (and especially young people) of color. The Barakas have both become ardent antiviolence activists speaking out directly on LGBT issues. Real violence has ironically brought Baraka back to a queer world that he had renounced so many years ago. Through his tremendous loss he has decided to further diversify his consistent commitment to activism and social justice to include what can only be understood as queer politics.”]

⁴⁴⁰ “New Jersey’s Poet Dilemma,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2002, A26. [Baraka’s post-September 11 poem, “Somebody Blew up America,” furthered the charge that Baraka was an anti-Semitic provocateur. He was New Jersey poet laureate at the time and the controversy made it possible for Governor James E. McGreevey to assert that he would get rid of the poet laureate position in New Jersey. The essence of the incident was summed up accurately in an opinion piece: “The poem’s mix of disenfranchised rage and appalling falsehood, and the controversy they have generated, are the hallmark of Mr. Baraka’s career. When you name a man known for ferocious political opinions as your poet laureate, you had better be prepared for poems that offend.”]

⁴⁴¹ David L. Smith, “Amiri Baraka and the Black Arts of Black Art,” *Boundary 2* 15, no. 1/2 (Autumn 1986): 235.

⁴⁴² Leaving behind this part of his life is of significance. Scholars have not overlooked it; they have connected this aspect of Baraka’s life to Clay in *Dutchman*, arguing that both Baraka and Clay underwent an exorcism, leaving the old self behind to discover a new self. See C. Lynn Munro, “LeRoi Jones: A Man in Transition,” *CLA Journal* 17 (September 1973): 66. Also, Jerome Klinkowitz, “LeRoi Jones (I. A. Baraka): *Dutchman* as Drama,” *Negro American Literature Forum* 7 (1973): 126.

⁴⁴³ Komozi Woodard, *A Nation Within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 59.

⁴⁴⁴ The theatre was located in a four-story brownstone at 109 West 130th Street.

community program that consisted of educating its students in remedial reading, mathematics, history, poetry, music, painting, and martial arts, and of course, playwriting. Daniel Matlin argues that BART/S has “scarcely been acknowledged for providing social and educational services to one of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the country.”⁴⁴⁵ At the same time, Martin also acknowledges that Baraka’s own belligerence “undermined the organization by attracting a number of young men who did not aspire to be socially responsible people.”⁴⁴⁶ Even Harold Cruse, who was one of the founders and taught history there, acknowledged that the destruction and collapse of BART/S came from the inside, stating that it was “taken over by the terrorists who forced out everyone else who would not agree with their mystique.”⁴⁴⁷ After staging some of Baraka’s plays,⁴⁴⁸ BART/S collapsed within a year.

Baraka then moved to Newark to start Spirit House, which operated under the same premise as BART/S. Though BART/S and Spirit House did not survive very long (Spirit House closed in 1968), both were inspiration for an emerging generation of poets and playwrights. BART/S and the Spirit House had a robust impact. Community theatres started to form around the country,⁴⁴⁹ and it was not long before they began to produce plays and to have poetry readings in schools, at local meeting places, and in open street venues. BART/S and Spirit House were foundations for Baraka’s nationalist politics.

Despite the strife surrounding Baraka’s creative odyssey, his productivity never wavered. Werner Sollors adds:

⁴⁴⁵ Daniel Matlin, “‘Lift Up Yr Self!’ Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition,” *Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006): 96.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴⁴⁷ Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 440.

⁴⁴⁸ *Experimental Death, Unit #1, A Black Mass, J E L L O, and Dutchman*.

⁴⁴⁹ For more on the rapid increase in black theatre during this era, see: Andrzej Ceynowa, “Black Theaters and Theater Organizations in America, 1961-1982: A Research List,” in “Black Theatre Issue,” *Black American Literature Forum* 17, no. 2 (Summer 1983).

Baraka's aesthetic and political writing of the early 1960s is full of contradictory impulses. Yet at the same time of his greatest theoretical confusion, he wrote many of his best poems, plays, and fictions. More than that, the very contradictions within his increasingly divided self are an important source of his creativity.⁴⁵⁰

Baraka has demonstrated repeatedly that he is the consummate artist, capable of producing art under the most extreme difficulties. Any examination of Baraka as an artist, provocateur, or demagogue will reveal that he is and always was a complex individual.

Many scholars have critically examined the man and his works (including Baraka himself).⁴⁵¹ This study does not attempt to cover the totality of Baraka's career; it takes a relatively small section of a broad canvas--focusing mainly on a single play, *Dutchman*, and its connection to the Civil Rights Movement and its prevailing ideologies. This narrow focus places emphasis on the play at a particular time, exploring how Baraka tailored *Dutchman*'s revolutionary politics to fit into the Civil Rights Movement.

Analyses of *Dutchman*, for the most part, run the thematic gamut from the Edenic Adam and Eve myth to the Flying Dutchman legend. Hugh Nelson offers an analysis of the latter, in which the cursed sailing ship sails endlessly at sea.⁴⁵² In *Dutchman*, Baraka suggests that America represents the cursed ship. In essence, America has doomed itself through its failure to recognize blacks as human, while Lula, a white woman representing America, participates in an endless act of murdering black men--until one (Clay) rouses himself into action.

⁴⁵⁰ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka /LeRoi Jones*, 62.

⁴⁵¹ Theodore R. Hudson, *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1973).

Lloyd W. Brown, *Amiri Baraka* (Boston: Twayne, 1980).

Henry C. Lacey, *To Raise, Destroy, and Create: The Poetry, Drama, and Fiction of Imamu Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones)* (Albany, NY: Whitston, 1981).

Jerry Gafio Watts, *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

[Those are only several of the books that focus on Baraka.]

⁴⁵² Hugh Nelson, "LeRoi Jones's *Dutchman*: A Brief Ride on a Doomed Ship," *Educational Theatre Journal* 20 (March 1968): 1.

Kimberly Benston ties *Dutchman* to the Adam and Eve myth.⁴⁵³ The biblical connection to *Dutchman* is obvious: Clay, the black naïve Adam, accepts the apple from Lula/Eve. Lula even tells Clay, “Eating apples together is always the first step.”⁴⁵⁴ As a figure that relies on her anger, assertiveness, and adventurousness, Baraka’s character Lula is often associated with Eve. Sandra Richards notes, “Like the first woman, Eve, she offers the apple of knowledge, which in this case is the brutal exposure of Clay’s latent will to rebel.”⁴⁵⁵ Phyllis Klotman, among many others, seconded the premise, stating, “Lula is Eve, of course, already otherwise as well as overstocked with apples--Baraka insists on the symbol.”⁴⁵⁶ The name also evokes Lilith. Lilith is a symbolic figure prominently connected to *Dutchman*--the beautiful woman who entices young men before killing them. Robert Cardullo is only one scholar who connects Lilith directly to *Dutchman*:

Lilith came to be known as the Queen of the Night, the Mother of Demons, and Satan’s concubine: she is depicted as an irresistible temptress whose lower body, like a mermaid’s, is fused into that of a serpent. Seductive, domineering, diabolical, and willing to kill to advance her own aims--this is Lula of the *Dutchman* by another name.⁴⁵⁷

Lilith, as Adam’s first wife, represents the rebellious, flirtatious, and seductive woman--traits attributed to Lula. More important, Lilith, particularly in contemporary fiction, has been portrayed as the demon-woman, exactly how Lula has been interpreted.

⁴⁵³ Benston, *Baraka*.

⁴⁵⁴ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 223. [Clinton F. Oliver and Stephanie Sills, eds., *Contemporary Black Drama: From A Raisin in the Sun to No Place to Be Somebody* (New York: Scribner, 1971). All future *Dutchman* references are to this edition and will occur incidentally in this chapter.]

⁴⁵⁵ Richards, “Negative Forces and Positive Non-Entities, 235.

⁴⁵⁶ Phyllis R. Klotman, “The White Bitch Archetype in Contemporary Black Fiction,” *Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1973): 99.

⁴⁵⁷ Robert Cardullo, “Names and Titles in Amiri Baraka’s *Dutchman*,” *ANQ: Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 22, no. 3 (2009): 56.

The play has also been interpreted as a victimization drama, placing Clay in the role of the central victim.⁴⁵⁸ While those analyses are useful for thematic interpretations, the focus here is to link *Dutchman* to the issues that were part of the fabric of the Civil Rights Movement and to reveal how *Dutchman* engaged audiences at an exact hour in history: in essence, how *Dutchman* provided a way into the politics of its time for audiences.

Charles Grimes, in his study of Harold Pinter, notes, “Political theatre is meant to lead audiences to action or to frame social attitudes so that progress can at least be contemplated.”⁴⁵⁹ Although Grimes was discussing Harold Pinter, the comment applies equally to Baraka, who seized the moment to dramatize in *Dutchman* the politics of Malcolm X. Thus, when Baraka states, “*Dutchman* was more militant in terms of the direct statement to white people; I thought it was more aggressive in responding to their violation of our humanity and our rights,” he links *Dutchman* to the specific politics of Malcolm X, which was not only explosive and dynamic but scared white America. It was not only Baraka who was acknowledging the influence of Malcolm X; Malcolm X was a major figure for many black artists of the time. M. S. Handler, who covered Malcolm X in many articles in the *New York Times*, acknowledged his role for black artists:

Many of the Negro writers and artists who are national figures today revered Malcolm for what they considered his ruthless honesty in stating the Negro case, his refusal to compromise and his search for a group identity that had been destroyed by the white man when he brought the Negroes in chains from Africa. The Negro writers and artists regarded Malcolm as the great catalyst, the man who inspired self-respect and devotion in the downtrodden millions.⁴⁶⁰

Regardless of whether black political leaders agreed or violently disagreed with Malcolm X, his influence, political ideology, and style widely infiltrated the artistic output of the 1960s. In

⁴⁵⁸ Sherley Anne Williams, “The Search for Identity in Baraka’s *Dutchman*,” in *Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones): A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Kimberly W. Benston (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 140.

⁴⁵⁹ Charles Grimes, *Harold Pinter’s Politics: A Silence Beyond Echo* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005).

⁴⁶⁰ M. S. Handler, introduction to *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, by Alex Haley (New York: Ballantine, 1964), xxix.

interviews, essays, articles, and poems, Baraka has repeatedly stressed Malcolm X's influence. For example, he paid homage to Malcolm X in a widely anthologized poem, *A Poem for Black Hearts*,⁴⁶¹ published in *Negro Digest* in September 1965.

When Edward Parone, who directed the original production of *Dutchman*, places the audience's reaction in perspective, he contextualizes the politics and its impact:

I didn't know how explosive it was going to be. It was like a trigger had been pulled. After the performance, several people said to me, "That's the first time I've ever been scared to death in the theatre." I guess they really thought somehow it was going to explode. At five o'clock, when we did the second performance, Mr. Barr, Mr. Wilder, and Mr. Albee were in the audience. The theater blew up all over again. I can't describe it. It's something that happens to you once in a lifetime, when you do something you think is going to work and [it] does work. It did, as it could happen only in New York. It was the talk of the town immediately.⁴⁶²

⁴⁶¹ For Malcolm's eyes, when they broke
 The face of some dumb white man, for
 Malcolm's hands raised to bless us
 All black and strong in his image
 Of ourselves, for Malcolm's words
 Fire darts, the victor's tireless
 Thrusts, words hung above the world
 Change as it may, he said it, and
 For this he was killed, for saying,
 And feeling, and being/change, all
 Collected hot in his heart, for Malcolm's
 Heart, raising us above our filthy cities,
 For his stride, and his beat, and his address
 To the grey monsters of the world, for Malcolm's
 Pleas for your dignity, black men, for your life,
 Black man, for the filling of your minds
 With righteousness, for all of him dead and
 Gone and vanished from us, and all of him which
 Clings to our speech black god of our time.
 For all of him, and all of yourself, look up,
 Black man, quit stuttering and shuffling, look up,
 Black man, quit whining and stooping, for all of him,
 For great Malcolm a prince of the earth, let nothing in us rest
 Until we avenge ourselves for his death, stupid animals
 That killed him, let us never breathe a pure breath, if
 We fail, and white men call us faggots till the end of
 The earth.

⁴⁶² Crespy, *Off-Off-Broadway Explosion*, 153

Baraka doggedly persisted in placing the politics of black cultural nationalism in front of the audience, encouraging blacks not to become victims like Clay. He was a serious black dramatist who demanded American society confront the racial issue that it ultimately had to face. Essentially, he put himself and his artistic vision on the line while forcing Americans (whites and blacks) to grapple with and think about racial politics.

Dutchman and Its Politics of Race

Dutchman, with its symbolic and mythic implications, appears to be a conventional two-character, two-scene drama in which an educated young black student and a Bohemian white woman encounter each other on the subway. After mockery, sarcastic hostility, comical enticement, and sexual flirtation, Clay and Lula enter the terrain of anger, accusations, and provocation, which leads to Clay's grabbing Lula by the throat before slapping her. Lula finally takes a knife out of her bag and stabs Clay; he dies. This brief synopsis does not capture the extensive and penetrating relationship of the politics to the drama--the vitality of *Dutchman* is its connection to the politics.

Dutchman, which was accepted at Theatre 1964 Playwright's Unit Workshop, under the direction of Richard Barr, Edward Albee, and Clinton Wilder, received its first production in March 1964 at the Cherry Lane Theatre⁴⁶³ and ran until February 1965; it had productions elsewhere in the United States (from Philadelphia to Chicago to Los Angeles), although it encountered problems at several theatres.⁴⁶⁴ It also received productions abroad, where it was generally well received. It was performed without interference in Stockholm, Bonn, Berlin,

⁴⁶³ It was mentioned earlier that *Dutchman* was presented at an avant-garde theatre. One critic referred to the Cherry Lane Theatre as the "Temple of the avant garde." [Jack Thompson, "Play Tops New Bill," *New York Journal-American*, March 25, 1964, 23.]

⁴⁶⁴ "L.A. Vice Squad Closes 2 LeRoi Jones Plays," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 3, 1965, 24; also: "*Dutchman* Involved in Management Fight," *Hartford Courant*, December 17, 1967, 17E. [Also see: Cecil Smith, "Furor Surrounds Jones Productions," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 1965, C11.]

Vienna, and London. *Dutchman* earned Baraka an Obie Award as the best Off-Broadway play of 1964. Robert Hooks and Jennifer West were in the original Off-Broadway production.

As noted before, 1964 was a pivotal year for the Civil Rights Movement. When Baraka stated that it was the year that the “National consciousness reawakened in Black People,”⁴⁶⁵ he was referring to a cultural autonomy, energizing a phase of racial assertiveness. Baraka was highlighting a division in the Civil Rights Movement between the integrationists and the nationalists. The radical faction, the Black Nationalists, was becoming a critical aspect of the Civil Rights Movement. Malcolm X, who left the Nation of Islam under Elijah Muhammad during the spring of 1964, became its spokesperson and radicalized elected black officials while appealing to disillusioned, disaffected, and frustrated blacks.

1964 became the year of more revolutionary demands for equality, particularly by Black Nationalists. Thus, Baraka and *Dutchman* could be seen as part of the shift from a move for gradual equality to equality-now demands. Black protest literature increasingly aligned with Black Nationalism. Ossie Davis, who had once declared that “Literature is meant to communicate in order to elevate,”⁴⁶⁶ now announced, “The Negro has to write protest literature. He cannot accept the position in which he finds himself. The protest must be loud, bitter and haranguing. It must aim at a corrective action now.”⁴⁶⁷ Baraka argued that black writers had to find their own political voice:

The Negro writer who duplicates the same old white lies except to change them to black is not saying anything except that he is so oppressed that he cannot express his own particular experience.⁴⁶⁸

This period witnessed an explosion of African-American drama covering a wide range of topics. Ossie Davis’s *Purlie Victorious* (1961), a comedy (discussed earlier) with an integration

⁴⁶⁵ LeRoi Jones, “To Survive ‘The Reign of the Beasts,’” *New York Times*, November 16, 1969, D1.

⁴⁶⁶ L. M. Meriwether, “Writers--Old and New Meet at Asilomar,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, August 13, 1964, D1.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

premise, took a humorous approach to the race issue. Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) explored racial identity from a surrealistic angle (produced by the same group that produced *Dutchman*). James Baldwin's *Blues for Mr. Charlie* (1964), inspired by the murder of Emmett Till, provided a naturalistic portrayal on Broadway of Southern racial hatred. Douglas Turner Ward's *Day of Absence* (1965) relied on satire to reveal how helpless Southern whites were without the assistance of blacks. But none exposed the anger of black America or challenged white audiences as Baraka did.

Dutchman's irony, symbolic richness, originality of thought, and dramatic complexity placed the drama in a class by itself. No artist undertook the substantial task of representing the radical view with more diligence than Baraka, who more than forty years later spoke of his responsibility and the controversy that surrounded the original production of *Dutchman*:

What that controversy did was to make clear that I had a responsibility—I was not just some Bohemian writer. The way people reacted to the play made me think I had some kind of specific responsibility vis-à-vis to tell of black people's experiences and to affirm the kinds of main tenets of our struggle for equal rights and self-determination.⁴⁶⁹

Baraka's reference to his responsibility is significant. In essence, the time had arrived for black authors to confront the truth—to render the true feelings of blacks. A little more than two decades before *Dutchman*, Langston Hughes had voiced similar concerns. His poem entitled *Note on Commercial Theatre* called for black artists to be responsible for their own creative work.⁴⁷⁰

You've taken my blues and gone--
You sing 'em on Broadway
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em

⁴⁶⁹ Amiri Baraka, interview with author (June 11, 2008).

⁴⁷⁰ *Note on Commercial Theatre* (1940)

So they don't sound like me--
 Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone
 You put me in *Macbeth* and *Carmen Jones*
 All kinds of *Swing Mikados*
 And in everything but what's about me--
 But someday somebody'll
 Stand up and talk about me--
 Black and beautiful--
 And sing about me,
 And put on plays about me!
 I reckon it'll be
 Me myself!

Yes, I reckon it'll be me.

Baraka, answering Hughes's call, was not alone in advocating the same premise. Novelist John Oliver Killens affirmed the notion the exact month that *Dutchman* opened:

A Negro artist, if he wishes to remain an artist, must reflect the feeling of his people. If he does not, he ceases to be an artist. Part of an artist's job is to reflect his own being, his own people, and his roots.⁴⁷¹

A few years earlier, Richard Wright, living in Paris at the time, stated, "The Negro artist must survive, and more than survive, must seek and tell the truth, no matter if it offends the smug black middle class, or their counterpart, the white bourgeoisie."⁴⁷²

While talking about his responsibility, Baraka alludes to *Dutchman's* cultural politics--a politics that questioned the established etiquette of race relations under segregation. His politics sought not only to challenge the existing code of conduct that reinforced white supremacy but also to open the gates for a new racial protocol that would exist between whites and blacks. *Dutchman* affirmed a political anger and not the appeasement of integration; it fostered a black political and cultural independence, challenging the hegemony of the political, spiritual, and

⁴⁷¹ M. S. Handler, "Negro Novelist Warns Whites on Racial Struggle," *New York Times*, March 29, 1964, 32.

⁴⁷² Edward Reeves, "Richard Wright Hits U.S. Racial Hypocrisy," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 28, 1960.

cultural values of integration. Whereas integration was assimilationism, the Black Nationalism of *Dutchman* asserted the hegemony of the political, spiritual, and cultural values of a black world view. The climax of *Dutchman*, with Clay's murder, suggested that the final goal of integration/assimilation is a fantasy. Whereas integration and nonviolence were closely connected, Baraka firmly rejected the concept of nonviolence:

Nonviolence, as a theory of social and political demeanor concerning American Negroes, means simply a continuation of the *status quo*. As this "theory" is applied to define specific terms of personal conduct Negroes are supposed to utilize, it assumes, again, the nature of that mysterious moral commitment Negro leaders say the black man must make to participate as a privileged class among the oppressed. Nonviolence on this personal (moral) level is the most sinister application of the Western method of confusing and subjugating peoples by convincing these peoples that the white West knows what is best for them.⁴⁷³

Dutchman was uncompromising in its dramatization of contemporary radical politics, a radical politics that did not veer away from violence. Reflecting on what he had expected of *Dutchman*, Baraka stated, "I meant it to be militant. I meant the work to be revolutionary. I meant to say things that had not been said."⁴⁷⁴ Emboldened by the rising black-power sentiment, Baraka wanted to subvert dominant civil rights ideologies.

The play is set in a New York City subway car. Baraka defined his stage space poetically: "In the flying underbelly of the city. Steaming hot, and summer on top, outside. Underground. The subway heaped in modern myth."⁴⁷⁵ The subway, in this instance, might be understood as a doomed slave ship, where a ritualistic cycle will continue until its destruction. Within this space a ritual unfolds. A white woman encounters a black student and goes about sexually enticing him to discover his authentic identity--that of an integrationist/assimilationist or a Black Nationalist.

⁴⁷³ LeRoi Jones, "What Does Nonviolence Mean," in *Crisis: Contemporary Reader*, ed. Peter Collier (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1969), 81.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, xx.

⁴⁷⁵ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 215.

Lula tells Clay, “I bet you never once thought you were a black nigger.” During their conversational exchanges and sexual advances, Lula uses verbal attacks as ploys. She finally discovers what she needs to know about Clay—he’s an assimilationist—before she stabs him.

The politics of this white woman/black man binary is symbolic of white dominance and black subjugation. Racial, political, and cultural histories informed every action of the two characters. These actions are the inevitable conclusions of American history. As James Baldwin insisted, “People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them.”⁴⁷⁶ Inherent in the mythic confrontation between Clay and Lula is the history that imprisons each symbolically within various determinants, particularly those established around race. Lula probes to see if Clay is liberated from his history. Clay, the sophomoric twenty-year-old, does not have the sophistication needed to decode the seductive actions of the thirty-year-old vixen. Lula intrinsically knows the intricate entanglements of her mission. She coyly tells Clay:

LULA

And we’ll pretend the people cannot see you. That is, the citizens.
And that you are free of your own history. And I am free of my
history. We’ll pretend that we are both anonymous beauties
smashing along through the city’s entrails.⁴⁷⁷

Werner Sollors notes, “Clay and Lula desired ‘invisibility’ as an escape from history into a transracial sexual encounter in a Bohemian ‘groove.’”⁴⁷⁸ Thus, regardless of Clay’s Baudelairian pretense and his Ivy League clothes, he is trapped within a history that is connected to the heritage of slavery. Contrary to Lula’s history-free position, ample textual clues allude to preexisting histories for both. For example, Lula refers to Clay’s history, identifying him as a “well-known type.” She is even more direct, “Your grandfather was a slave, he didn’t go to

⁴⁷⁶ James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” in *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon, 1955), 163.

⁴⁷⁷ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 223.

⁴⁷⁸ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*, 119.

Harvard.”⁴⁷⁹ Lula also connects Clay to the history of slavery, referring to him as an “escaped nigger” who “crawled through the wire and made tracks to my side.”⁴⁸⁰

Dutchman is a drama of confrontation rooted in the history of black and white in America. The characters embody the history of black collective oppression and white supremacy. The audience is clearly aware of Clay’s association with the history of subjugation, just as it is aware of Lula’s one of domination. Clay’s ultimate demise results from his rejection of history and his inability to take control of it. His inability to defend himself was connected to the fact that he had denied his history.

Baraka constructs the drama around the body of a white woman, as a locus of sex, power, and racism. Although *Dutchman* is an erotically charged drama, Lula’s game of seduction does not have the goal of sex. She is excavating for the truth--the truth of Clay’s internal ignition. Baldwin argues, “No black man can hope ever to be entirely liberated from his internal warfare.”⁴⁸¹ Lula seeks to discover if Clay’s, ingrained due to history, embraces hostility and hatred of whites. To do that, she opens the ritual doors of seduction, dismantling the taboos of black man/white woman sexual liaisons. Lula’s task is to get Clay to unmask himself, to discard his inauthentic assimilationist manner; she needs to know his true identity.

LULA

When you get drunk, pat me once, very lovingly on the flanks, and
I’ll look at you cryptically, licking my lips.

(*Dutchman*, 223)

Although Lula has the power to dominate and control, she does not know the true Clay; therefore, the unmasking was essential. Clay is forced to relinquish his pretenses, allowing his true blackness to come to the surface. The unmasking Lula desires is to know Clay’s true

⁴⁷⁹ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 222.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 226 -227.

⁴⁸¹ Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” 165.

“pumping black heart.” The concept of unmasking, which is embedded in the black experience, is evident in an African-American proverb, “Got one mind for white folks to see, another for what I know is me.”⁴⁸² The trope of the mask as a strategy for coping with a white world goes back to the nineteenth century. It can be found in Paul Laurence Dunbar’s 1896 poem, *We Wear the Mask*, which explains this masquerade.⁴⁸³ It is the theme of Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*,⁴⁸⁴ originally published in French, which explored the feelings of dependency and inadequacy that blacks experience in a white world. Thus, the racial unmasking of Clay would transform the masquerade between the two.

Who is the real Clay, or what is he like without his mask? This is a point that Susan Sontag comprehended, commenting that by the end of the play, Clay had been poked and prodded by Lula until he “strips down to his true self; he stops being nice, well-spoken, reasonable, and assumes his full Negro identity: that is, he announced the homicidal rage toward whites that Negroes bear in their hearts, whether they act on it or not. He will not kill, he says. Whereupon,

⁴⁸² David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 268.

⁴⁸³ Dunbar’s poem, “We Wear the Mask,” explains why blacks wear a mask:

We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!

⁴⁸⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 1st Evergreen Edition (New York: Grove, 1968).

he is killed.”⁴⁸⁵ Dianne H. Weisgram also acknowledged the unmasking, stating “the most dramatic moment of *Dutchman* occurs when Clay throws off or breaks out of his conformist self, his false, white man’s self. The theme of the erupting black identity is conceived by Jones in terms of a rage so intense that when Clay’s repressed self emerges, he dies in the next instant.”⁴⁸⁶ Once Clay’s mask is removed and his “pumping black heart” is revealed, Lula no longer has to conceal her real intention. The destruction of Clay is inevitable. While Lula may be an embodiment of white racism and oppression, making her a mythical seductress/killer raised other issues in feminist criticism. Deborah Thompson’s response, while critical, nonetheless captures Baraka’s strategy.

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, particularly, makes me personally angry as he subordinates (my) gender oppression to (his) racial oppression. In fact, he even denies my gender oppression even as he perpetuates it. Embodying the myth of the black rapist in his plays, Baraka plays on my fears and vulnerability as a woman, and forces me to participate more strongly in a racist cultural psyche. I resent him for forcing me to feel my own embodiment, to play the white woman, to be racist. Baraka’s paradigm, in addition, has undoubtedly been read as justifying white fears of black power; give blacks a little power and all havoc, rape, and murder break loose. The rape of one white woman by one black man justifies, demands, a hundred lynchings. The white woman as symbol of a sublime transcendent white culture is strengthened, an actual white woman is brutally victimized in the transaction between white men and black men, actual white women are further disempowered by their own fears of being raped and their dependence on men for protection, and black women are once again left out, unseen, in this ritual which forces racial conflict into visibility.”⁴⁸⁷

By making Lula the victimizer rather than the victim, the complex issues of racism are foregrounded with searing intensity.

⁴⁸⁵ Susan Sontag, “Going to Theater, Etc.,” *Partisan Review* 31, no. 3 (Summer 1964): 393.

⁴⁸⁶ Dianne H. Weisgram, “LeRoi Jones’ *Dutchman*: Inter-racial Ritual of Sexual Violence,” *American Imago* 29, no. 3 (Fall 1972): 223.

⁴⁸⁷ Deborah Thompson, “Reversing Blackface Minstrelsy, Improvising Racial Identity: Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro*,” *Post Identity* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 23-24.

Dutchman and Race War

Despite the challenges to its philosophy, integration continued its advance in the mid-1960s, but so did violent conflicts between whites and blacks. Protests, riots, and assassinations proliferated, and the unrest between whites and blacks intensified. The country was in a historic national crisis; events were destabilizing America. The increased violence became front-page news in newspapers; television brought something new into the homes of whites and blacks, suggesting that there was the prospect of warfare between them. *Dutchman* was a product of that polarized milieu. David Littlejohn, author of the seminal 1966 book *Black on White: A Critical Survey of Writing by American Negroes*, classified *Dutchman* as race-war literature. Littlejohn argued that the “occasion and the substance of most Negro writing in America is still the undeclared race war in which all Americans are, by definition, involved.”⁴⁸⁸ Michael Awkward goes to the point when he states, “Littlejohn argues that white readers--the primary audience of this literature in his view--need to develop interpretive strategies which allow them to respond effectively to these military acts and to protect themselves from the guilt and pain that result as a necessary consequence of interactions with black literature.”⁴⁸⁹ Despite the fact that many blacks were critical of Littlejohn’s book, Lula’s final action in *Dutchman* supports the race-war premise.

“Race war” became a ubiquitous phrase in the 1960s, connected to various strategies, activities, and proposals advocated or feared by civil rights leaders and organizations. James Farmer, national director of CORE, warned that the Black Nationalists were proposing a race war.⁴⁹⁰ A. Philip Randolph warned that a white backlash to civil rights demands would cause a

⁴⁸⁸ David Littlejohn, *Black on White: A Critical Survey of Writing by American Negroes* (New York: Viking, 1966), 4.

⁴⁸⁹ Michael Awkward, *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 63.

⁴⁹⁰ Fred Powledge, “Negroes Ponder Malcolm’s Move,” *New York Times*, March 15, 1964, 46.

race war.⁴⁹¹ Historian Charles Hamilton warned that if an armed revolution did happen, blacks would lose a race war.⁴⁹² Even James Baldwin warned that the racial crisis could possibly explode into a race war.⁴⁹³ Of course, Black Nationalists, particularly Malcolm X,⁴⁹⁴ were stridently predicting a race war. For example, in a speech in Cairo, Illinois, he stated, “Negro resistance to further abuses and denials of their constitutional privileges was unrelenting and could develop into a full-scale race war in America.”⁴⁹⁵ Scholars such as Werner Sollors have explored the race-war sentiment in *Dutchman*.⁴⁹⁶ Baraka himself hints at the race-war mentality, or the stand-and-fight sentiment that was prevalent, insisting that to “back off” was not an option:

What I wanted to accomplish was to say things that I thought had to be said—to suggest that black people had reached the stage where they were not willing to back off. The question of integration was clear—talking about some kind of separate but equal, and at the same time, you cannot take the kind of racism that you are going to meet—even in the so-called attempt to integrate.⁴⁹⁷

With *Dutchman*, Baraka tapped into an emerging historic national crisis. *Dutchman*, in effect, married politics and history for its audiences under the aegis of a race conflict. But that race-war ideology was not limited to *Dutchman*. Two other one-acts by Baraka from that period, *The Toilet* and *The Slave*, written before but produced after *Dutchman*, expressed similar themes. *The Slave* and *The Toilet* opened at the St. Marks Playhouse (New York City) in December 1964. Like *Dutchman*, they both embodied a theatre for social change with a militant sensibility. *The Toilet* concerns an incident of black-on-white violence, the beating of a white homosexual by a

⁴⁹¹ “Negro Leader Sees Danger of Race War,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 22, 1966, 23.

⁴⁹² Donald Janson, “A Theorist Terms Black Power ‘Clear Alternative’ to Violence,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1968, 18.

⁴⁹³ “Race War Foreseen by James Baldwin,” *New York Times*, July 27, 1964, 18.

⁴⁹⁴ He had predicted a race war in many of his speeches, especially in 1964. *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 29, 1964, 15.

⁴⁹⁵ Robert C. Maynard, “Black Nationalists Predict ‘Race War,’” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, September 24, 1967, C1.

⁴⁹⁶ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*, 128.

⁴⁹⁷ Baraka, interview.

group of black students in the school bathroom. It is an allegory of black/white relationships in America. The homophobic tension is obvious in the drama, but what Baraka is after is similar to the message delivered in *Dutchman*. That is the prime premise in *The Slave*, in which a black militant urges an uprising and goes to his white ex-wife and murders her current white husband. The black man then leaves her and his mulatto children to die in an explosion that destroys their home. Both dramas are about the liberation of blacks and the death of white America, the recurring theme in the merciless revolutionary theatre of Baraka. Both plays were meant to stir up commitment from blacks while advocating black liberation. Harold Clurman recognized the kinship among the three plays, noting in *The Nation* that *The Toilet* and *The Slave* were creations in the same spirit as *Dutchman*. He concluded, “I do not *admire* these plays or call them *good*. But despite their malformation and immaturity, I believe them important. They are to be heeded. They say, ‘beware!’”⁴⁹⁸

Throughout the 1960s, there were major riots in cities across America. While America had experienced various sociopolitical disturbances throughout its history, the frequency, scope, and number of race riots during the 1960s was unprecedented. During this period between 1964 and 1971, there were more than 750 riots in the United States.⁴⁹⁹ Baraka’s audiences would have been acutely sensitive to the impact of the riots, and the plays served to further unsettle white audiences. *The New York Times*’ Howard Taubman, addressing Clay’s indictment of white society, wrote:

If this is the way the Negroes really feel about the white world around them, there is more rancor buried in the breasts of colored conformists than anyone can imagine. If this is the way even one

⁴⁹⁸ Harold Clurman, “Theatre: LeRoi Jones,” *Nation*, January 4, 1965, 17.

⁴⁹⁹ Gregg Lee Carter, “In the Narrows of the 1960s U.S. Black Rioting,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 30, no. 1 (March 1986): 115.

Negro feels, there is ample cause for guilt as well as alarm, and for a hastening of change.⁵⁰⁰

According to Ronald Segal, race war was a major threat to America:

Since the riots of the 1964 summer in several cities, and especially since the explosion of violence and explicit race hatred in the Negro ghetto of Los Angeles the year after, many Americans have come to see their streets as battlefields, in a mounting guerilla warfare of race. What has long been happening in the South of the United States is now happening in the North--a development of racial stress to the degree where it threatens society itself with a nervous breakdown. And in both regions the clash is based upon fear and centered around power.⁵⁰¹

Racial strife was the prominent issue on the minds of Americans and a transformation of racial conduct would be the certain outcome. Nat Hentoff adamantly stated that a change had to occur:

A social change is required and it is not going to be given by the white majority. Nothing is going to happen now without black power. The only change has come through the pressure of Negro revolt. Whites aren't going to give up anything.⁵⁰²

But as Eliot Fremont Smith observed, society, "by its very nature, wants to hold onto its own, to keep things as they are."⁵⁰³ This in essence was Lula's position--keeping Clay in his place. More than anything else, what disgraced the white power structure was the contradiction in its pluralistic vision. John Hope Franklin rendered that contradiction as the "unconscionable treatment of its Negro citizens."⁵⁰⁴

Lula was more than a crazy white woman on the subway declaring her dominance, just as Clay was more than a black man on the subway allowing himself to be manipulated. Baraka presented Lula and Clay as embodiments of the lopsided power structure, explicitly warning

⁵⁰⁰ Taubman, "Dutchman," 46.

⁵⁰¹ Ronald Segal, *The Race War* (New York: Viking, 1967), 177.

⁵⁰² Meriwether, "Writers--Old and New Meet at Asilomar," D1.

⁵⁰³ Eliot Fremont-Smith, "Books of the Times: *Storm Warnings*," *New York Times*, July 12, 1967, 41.

⁵⁰⁴ John Hope Franklin, "The Negro Dilemma," *New York Times*, January 17, 1960, AD5.

white America of a new revolutionary arrangement that would define and affirm the new racial order. Dianne Weisgram argues that Baraka presented Lula as a symbol of all white people: “Racists, belles, liberals, rationalists, missionaries, and educators alike.”⁵⁰⁵ Baraka, however, claims she was not:

How can one white person be all white persons, unless all white persons are alike? Are they? Similarly, it is equally stupid to think of the Negro boy as all Negroes, even though, as I’ve said, most white people do think of black men simply as Negroes, and not as individual men.⁵⁰⁶

Nonetheless, Baraka admitted that Lula might represent the spirit of America:

But I will say this, if the girl (or the boy) in that play has to “represent” anything, I mean if she must be symbolic in the way demented academicians use the term, she does not exist at all. She is not meant to be a symbol—nor is Clay—but a real person, a real thing, in a real world. She does not represent any thing—she is one. And perhaps that thing is America, or at least its spirit.⁵⁰⁷

But clearly, the play expressed the political tensions of its time, an explosive moment in American history. When the play was revived in 2007, it lacked the context of the Civil Rights Movement and an emerging black militarism. The drama was alienated from its roots; the politics that provided its strength and fascination was missing. That is what Baraka skirts around when he compares the original production to the 2007 New York production:

The original production had the excitement of its being original. I was glad to see this production and I thought a lot of interesting things happened. I even think Bill Duke [the director] tried to do an outstanding kind of job with the things he wanted to do with it, the whole coming into the theatre and having the conductor actually being there taking the tickets. He had some very good innovations, but as I say, when you look at stuff, you have to say what is the difference. Well, it was more exciting in the beginning because it was the beginning. But it was important to see it again.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁵ Weisgram, “LeRoi Jones’ *Dutchman*, 221.

⁵⁰⁶ LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 187.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ Baraka, interview.

However, in 1985, Baraka was more direct about *Dutchman*'s gaining strength from its time. He discussed how the audience related to the drama and how *Dutchman* was of that political moment:

They reacted to the language and the dialogue, but I think they were puzzled. Where the woman gets really crazy and the young boy starts denouncing her. It seemed they were trying to figure out what was happening. It seemed to be like a mystery play. Then, when the boy is killed, it's kind of a shock. You could see people leaning back. I think the whole context of that time, the social context of the play, added to it. Works really feed on their time and take their strength from that time. And *Dutchman* really reflects the things that were happening during that period. So most of the power in that play is just what I was able to get from what was happening.⁵⁰⁹

Baraka therefore acknowledges the race-war fervor, which surrounds the characterizations of Lula and Clay. Lula is represented as a threat to black Americans and Baraka dramatizes Clay as a potential threat to the existing hegemony. Within these two dramatic constructs is the racial politics that identifies race war as a potential outcome of the unprecedented acts of social protest.

Dutchman and the Black Bourgeoisie

Whether or not Lula can be seen as a symbol of all white people, she reinforces the cultural narrative in which whites manipulate, exploit, control, and destroy when necessary. But on some level Lula is also the voice of Baraka challenging the values of the black middle class:

LULA

In that funnybook jacket with all the buttons. [*More animate, taking hold of his jacket*] What've you got that jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why're you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by.

(*Dutchman*, 222)

⁵⁰⁹ James Hatch, interview with Amiri Baraka (March 30, 1985), in "Artist and Influence," vol. 3 (1985), Hatch-Billops Collection, New York, 12.

Scholars and critics have spent considerable time accentuating Baraka's anger and attack on white America, yet his attack on the black middle class has received scant exploration.⁵¹⁰

However, Clive Barnes did acknowledge it in one of Baraka's later plays:

LeRoi Jones's mind-popping *Great Goodness of Life*, a two-fisted attack on the complacency of the black middle class conceived with great dramatic force and with its passionate irony hidden almost to the last in a white velvet glove. A beautiful, angry play. But beautiful and angry are the qualities of black theatre that are making the rest of us appear oddly pallid in comparison.⁵¹¹

Jack Newfield also stated that Baraka "taunts the middle class for its passivity."⁵¹² If *Dutchman*'s dramatized message resonates with a wrath against white America's oppression, derogation, stereotypical allusions, and prison-like control of blacks, then, too, it equally dramatizes an outrage against the attitude, political posturing, and commitment of the black middle class.

Philip Altbach argues that Black Power was the consequence of the frustration of blacks that also brought along an increased castigation of the black middle class.⁵¹³ *Dutchman* is saturated with such attacks and denunciations. According to Lula, Clay was not only middle class; he was a middle-class white man.

Baraka admits that *Dutchman* centers on the seduction of middle-class blacks. Addressing Clay's murder, he states:

Dutchman is a portrait of America and it was meant to be. It is not just a tale about being seduced by a white woman; it's a tale about the kind of seduction the black middle class, particularly black intellectuals, experiences. It's not simply like, say, Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*. I was really talking about a false welcome into

⁵¹⁰ I do not wish to leave the impression that Baraka's attack on the black middle class is the only one by a black artist. One needs only to look at Langston Hughes's June 1926 essay published in *Nation*, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," which also attacked the black middle class.

⁵¹¹ Barnes, "Black Theater: Of Politics and Passion," 36.

⁵¹² Jack Newfield, "LeRoi Jones at Arms: Blues for Mr. Whitey," *Village Voice*, December 17, 1964, 1.

⁵¹³ Philip G. Altbach, "Black Power and the U.S. Civil Rights Movement," *Economic and Political Weekly* 1, no. 6 (September 24, 1966): 234.

society. Clay is being told either you will join us or you are going to be iced.⁵¹⁴

But Baraka also acknowledged that both characters were victims. Soon after the original production of *Dutchman* in 1964, Baraka stated, “The boy senses the basic delusions in middle class Negro life; the girl is still a product of the establishment, of the great white power structure. So the pressures get to them too, causing friction, baring murderous instincts.”⁵¹⁵ Lula’s condemnation of Clay as a middle-class black assimilationist places him in an associative paradigm that coincided with black middle-class degradation.

In 1957, in his controversial *Black Bourgeoisie*, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier analyzed the middle-class black character that Clay seems to represent:

Middle-class Negroes do not express their resentment against discrimination and insults in violent outbreaks, as lower-class Negroes often do. They constantly repress their hostility toward whites and seek to soothe their hurt self-esteem in all kinds of rationalizations.⁵¹⁶

Frazier continues with this line of thought, arguing that it was unlikely that the middle-class Negro would break out of this paradigm. Though he noted that a middle-class black once confessed to him “that some day he was going to break loose and tell white people what he really thought.”⁵¹⁷ This could be Clay. Lula keeps pushing him toward the breaking point and her taunts become crude and overtly racist.

LULA.

(*Becoming annoyed that he will not dance, and becoming more animated as if to embarrass him still further*) Come on, Clay ... let's do the thing. Uhh! Uhh! Clay! Clay! You middle-class black bastard. Forget your social-working mother for a few seconds and let's knock stomachs. Clay, you liver-lipped white man. You

⁵¹⁴ Charlie Reilly, “An Interview with Amiri Baraka,” in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*, ed. Charlie Reilly (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 256-257.

⁵¹⁵ Gene Palatsky, “See the Lie,” *Newark Evening News*, March 30, 1964.

⁵¹⁶ E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press, 1997), 225. [Frazier’s controversial *Black Bourgeoisie* was published in 1957 but its tenets were still very relevant during the original production of *Dutchman*.]

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

would-be Christian. You ain't no nigger, you're just a dirty white man. Get up, Clay. Dance with me, Clay.

(*Dutchman*, 227)

Frazier, who was one of Baraka's professors at Howard University, provided a harsh critique of the black middle class in his *Black Bourgeoisie*, arguing that the black elite was ashamed of its black cultural heritage and had readily accepted a shallow white-culture model. Frazier's book found major support in black communities and among black college students who were disappointed with social and political changes. Maxine Leeds Craig writes about a youthful vitality that demanded action:

When youthful participants in the Civil Rights Movement criticized the middle class, their charges were directed precisely at the limited tactics used by the NAACP. Young civil rights activists were willing to take greater risks to pursue similar goals, which were referred to as "first-class citizenship": the right to make purchases, the right to service, the right to vote, the right to be educated at the best state-supported institutions.⁵¹⁸

Along with the criticism came an increasing militancy, directed as much against the blacks as at whites. Malcolm X, who invigorated the emerging militancy and had many youthful followers, was straightforward in his attack on the black middle class, arguing against those who denounced or were in opposition to Black Nationalists:

Those are Black Pharisees middle-class Negroes satisfied with things as they are so long as they are permitted to be comfortable and live out their lives as carbon copies of the white man.⁵¹⁹

Alex Haley, contextualizing Malcolm X's criticism of the black middle class, wrote that Malcolm X "Uncle Tommed practically every Negro leader in the nation."⁵²⁰ (Haley, who wrote

⁵¹⁸ Maxine Leeds Craig, *Ain't I a Beauty Queen: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 132.

⁵¹⁹ Robert L. Teague, "Negroes Say Conditions in U.S. Explain Nationalists' Militancy," *New York Times*, March 2, 1961, 17.

⁵²⁰ Alex Haley, "In 'Uncle Tom' Are Our Guilt and Hope," *New York Times*, March 1, 1964, SM23. [This article is highly recommended for anyone who wishes to delineate the definition, application, historical transformation, and impact of the term "Uncle Tom" and its associative connections to the black experience. In addition, Malcolm X's "house Negro" premise is still very much alive. For example, Ayman al-Zawahiri (who was al-Qaeda's deputy leader at the time of this statement) referred to

Malcolm X's memoir *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, omitted that Malcolm X even described him as "a house Negro who works in the white man's house and keeps him aware of what angry Negroes are thinking."⁵²¹) Michael Eric Dyson, author of *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X*, is more direct, stating that Malcolm X called Martin Luther King an Uncle Tom and Reverend Dr. Chickenwing.⁵²² This is, of course, the language Lula uses to goad Clay: using brutal racial insults and accusing him of being the most despicable coward--allowing the rape of his mother:

LULA

(Twisting out of his reach) Screw yourself, Uncle Tom. Thomas Woolly-head. *(Begins to dance a kind of jig, mocking Clay with loud forced humor)* There is Uncle Tom...I mean, Uncle Thomas Woolly-head. With old white matted mane. He hobbles on his wooden cane. Old Tom. Old Tom. Let the white man hump his ol' mama, and he jes' shuffle off in the woods and hide his gentle gray head. Ol' Thomas Woolly-head

(Dutchman, 228)

Lula continues with her insults, going beyond merely embarrassing Clay to actually making a psychic wound. After a relentless effort to provoke, she awakens Clay's aggression when she declares that the fear of white people was, in essence, in his DNA:

LULA

You're afraid of white people. And your father was. Uncle Tom Big Lip!

(Dutchman, 228)

The ancestral aspect of the accusation brought about the most dramatic moment of *Dutchman*: Clay finally releases his controlled hostility and shows his embedded hatred of whites, announcing that he is at last his own man, that he is no longer a middle-class fake.

President Barack Obama as a "House Negro." Sebastian Abbot, "Bin Laden Distressed by Obama?" *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City, Utah), June 4, 2009, A8].

⁵²¹ *Chicago Defender*, January 12, 1963, 13.

⁵²² Michael Eric Dyson, "Haunted by Conspiracy," *New York Times*, January 27, 1995, A27.

Of course, not everyone felt that the black middle class deserved condemnation. Despite the harsh criticism and backlash against middle-class blacks during the civil rights era, one notable scholar argued that the black middle class was not given “credit for the maturity and social responsibility upon which the Negro’s fight for first-class citizenship has finally depended.”⁵²³ Thaddeus Martin argues that in *Dutchman*, Baraka is overly concerned with “the poignant predicament in which the black bourgeoisie presently finds itself, as this much maligned segment of black society symbolically confronts white America.”⁵²⁴ Harold Cruse also points out the contradictions in the criticism against the middle class, arguing that “it is the younger generation, middle-class elements who become politically radicalized.”⁵²⁵ Furthermore, Cruse goes to the heart of the point when he asserts that black power theorists, “although they snipe at the black bourgeoisie, are themselves prey to bourgeois aspirations--major or minor.”⁵²⁶

Baraka, prior to *Dutchman*, had attacked the black middle class for the failure of black artists to discover their own language. Horace Cayton, who was a prominent sociologist and co-author with St. Clair Drake of the 1945 *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, stated in 1964:

Of all our arts, it has been the writer who has fashioned brave new worlds. All men dream of freedom, but it requires the writer to put these dreams into form that will move men into action.⁵²⁷

In 1963, Baraka claimed that “only in music, and most conspicuously in blues, jazz and spirituals--‘Negro music’--has there been a significant contribution by American Negroes.”⁵²⁸ He goes on, attributing the lack of contribution to “high art” to the influence of the black middle

⁵²³ C. Eric Lincoln, “The Negro’s Middle-Class Dream,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1964, 99.

⁵²⁴ Thaddeus Martin, “*Dutchman* Reconsidered,” *Black American Literature Forum* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 62.

⁵²⁵ Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 179.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 560.

⁵²⁷ Meriwether, “Writers--Old and New Meet at Asilomar,” D1.

⁵²⁸ Homer Smith, “Negro Writers Shifting from Racial Themes,” *Chicago Defender*, April 27, 1963, 9.

class. Baraka called for black writers to disengage from the “weak, heinous elements of that culture (middle class) that spawned it.” He argued:

But as long as the Negro writer contents himself with the imitation of the useless, ugly inelegance of the stunted middle class mind, academic or popular, and refuses to look around and “tell it like it is”—preferring the false prestige of the black bourgeoisie or the deceitful “acceptance” of buy and sell America—he will be a failure. What is worse, not even a significant failure, just another dead American.⁵²⁹

After *Dutchman* opened, Baraka continued his attack on the black middle-class writers:

The Negro writer who duplicates the same old white lies, except to change them to black, is not saying anything except that he is so oppressed that he cannot express his own particular experience.⁵³⁰

Baraka went on to state that the black writer needed to “acknowledge his blackness, and to find out who he really is,”⁵³¹ a premise not only for Clay but one that applied to Baraka.

Just as Baraka did not succumb to the seductive ideas of the black middle class, Clay, ultimately, did not succumb to Lula’s seductive enticement or her stereotypical ideas—but at a price. In defending himself, Clay becomes a man. In the process, Clay performs a dramatic action by slapping Lula; he captures the attention of the audience as he owns his identity:

(*CLAY slaps her as hard as he can, across the mouth. LULA’S head bangs against the back of the seat. When she raised it again, CLAY slaps her again.*)

CLAY

Now shut up and let me talk.

(*Dutchman*, 228)

Clay then offers his signature monologue, declaring that he would no longer play the role of a whitened stereotype. He declares his independence, expresses his black manhood, and frees himself of his repressed unconscious while reclaiming his identity:

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Meriwether, “Writers--Old and New Meet at Asilomar,” D1.

⁵³¹ Ibid.

CLAY

...You telling me what I ought to do. (*Sudden scream frightening the whole coach*) Well, don't! Don't you tell me anything! If I'm a middle-class fake white man...let me be. And let me be in the way I want. (*Through his teeth*) I'll rip your lousy breasts off! Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see. An act. Lies. Device. Not the pure heart, the pumping heart. You don't ever know that. And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting all your throats.

(*Dutchman*, 229)

The monologue validated Clay's identity, manhood, and politics. One scholar accurately argues, "Clay's last angry monologue marks a change in the power dynamics at work in the play—a change in power that corporealizes the specter of castrations."⁵³² Clay must become a man for the dramaturgical action of the play to culminate. In addition, the monologue characterized the central tenet of subversive ideology, and most important, it revealed that Clay is no longer powerless. Foremost, it supported the politicization of black militancy.

Thus, it does not weaken Clay or the play, it validates both. While contextualizing black literature of the 1960s, scholar Darwin Turner argued that "Manhood seems determined partly by the willingness of black males to challenge white authority even if that challenge is suicidal."⁵³³ It was as if he had taken Clay's ultimate action into consideration. Although Clay's murder symbolizes that he has become a man (his own individual), Baraka suggests it would have been best if Clay had left behind or discarded the integrationist philosophy, his middle-class baggage. Clay discovered too late that his three-button suit, his white shirt and tie, and his Baudelaire armor would not protect him. Baraka heralded his revolutionary message: To survive in the white world, unrobe from the Ivy League, middle-class trappings. That premise caused one critic

⁵³² Matthew Reborn, "Playing Dutchman: Masochism, Minstrelsy, and the Gender Politics of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*," *Callaloo* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 804.

⁵³³ Darwin T. Turner, "Visions of Love and Manliness in a Blackening World: Dramas of Black Life from 1953-1970," *Iowa Review* 16, no. 2 (Spring 1975): 89.

to argue, “There is no doubt that this anger is justified, but there is also no doubt, I think, that in this case it is inartistic, weakening the character and the play.”⁵³⁴ The critic missed the dramaturgical urgency of the drama that resonated with the black audience; Clay had taken the necessary first step to establish his own individualism.

The cultural and political ideology and mythology of the United States have been bound up with the notion of individualism since the founding of the country; to deny it to an entire class of citizens can be devastating. Psychiatrist Alvin Poussaint was correct when he wrote during the Civil Rights Movement era, “With our country’s emphasis on individualism and the idealization of the self-made man, brutalization into passivity leaves the Negro with a major handicap.”⁵³⁵ Thus, Lula’s rejection of Clay’s individuality was of grave consequence. “How do you know so much about me,” Clay asks. She tells him, “You’re a well-known type.” Lula situates Clay within a frame that she controls, allowing her the power to dictate what he should do, who he should be, and what he should strive to achieve:

LULA

What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and a striped tie?

(*Dutchman*, 222)

Clay is an object to Lula. To her, he is not only a “well-known type,” she knows him “like the palm of my hand.” He fits the mold of the stereotype in which she places him. Explicit stereotyping of blacks by whites has long perpetuated faulty identities, which result in false symbolic representations. Of course, this suggests that *Dutchman* may have thematic issues that go beyond race. In Poland in 1967, there was an all white production that placed an emphasis on the importance of not betraying oneself:

⁵³⁴ Oliver, “Off Broadway: Over the Edge,” 79.

⁵³⁵ Alvin F. Poussaint, “A Negro Psychiatrist Explains the Negro Psyche,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1967, 52.

If the interest in *Dutchman* were limited to racial matters only, especially Black-white relations, the play could be expected to have little appeal to audiences for whom such problems are nonexistent. In 1967, however, the play was successfully presented by an all-white cast in Warsaw, Poland, at Teatr Kameralny. If I may speculate about what held the audiences in this racially-uniform society, I would say that, free from being pre-conditioned to see a racial problem, the Polish theatregoers saw *Dutchman* as a play about honesty towards oneself and the wages of betraying one's people in the hour of confrontation with a suppressive, alien power. If this is so, then Lula's and Clay's "color" ultimately becomes immaterial.⁵³⁶

What is important in Andrzej Ceynowa's perspective is the overriding context of betraying oneself, or forgoing one's individualism. Baraka makes it clear that Clay's masking his individualism is an essential part of his identity but that it is imperative for blacks to unmask in order to progress.

There is no denying that Lula's action is the catalyst for Clay's rage. Clay declared and asserted his independence, affirming the right to define himself as he sees fit, and also to depict and reshape himself in the unique way appropriate to his blackness. He determines what is best for him. Lula's goal, on the other hand, was to contain and control him, which she was prepared to accomplish by any means necessary, in this case by taking his life. Clay was in fact a sacrificial lamb representative of blacks, his death a warning to them. Philip Effiong goes further to argue that the sacrifice motif, which was connected to racial conflict and racial tension, was present not only in *Dutchman* but in many of Baraka's plays, including *The Toilet*, *Experimental Death of Unit # 1*, *Home on the Range*, *Junkies are Full of (Shhh...)*, and *The Death of Malcolm X*.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Andrzej Ceynowa, "The Dramatic Structure of *Dutchman*," in "Black Theatre Issue," *Black American Literature Forum* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 18.

⁵³⁷ Philip Uko Effiong, *In Search of a Model for African-American Drama: A Study of Selected Plays by Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, and Ntozake Shange* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2000), 86.

If in 1966, Baraka rejected the idea of Lula as a symbol of America, by 2007 he “saw her as a metaphor for America. She represented temptation and seduction, but also death, if not of the flesh then of the spirit.”⁵³⁸ Accentuating temptation and seduction, Baraka places Lula in a dramaturgical frame in which she relies on the power of her sex to accomplish her task, and uses that power destructively. As Henry Louis Gates has noted, “The white woman, in black literature, is bad news.”⁵³⁹ This is most applicable to Lula. Interracial sex has a long history in literature, often with the black man paying a terrible price for transgressing that boundary.⁵⁴⁰

Early on, the sexual sparring encodes Lula’s free spirit and represents the uncharted territory between them:

LULA

Would you like to get involved with me, Mister Man?

CLAY

(Trying to be as flippant as Lula, whacking happily at the apple)
Sure. Why not? A beautiful woman like you. Huh, I’d be a fool not to.

(Dutchman, 219)

Lula’s exploitation of her sexuality does get Clay’s attention; his interaction is to subordinate himself to her sexual fancies. Although she claimed that Clay is the aggressor and was staring at her, the psychosexual significance is that Lula was the aggressor from the start—she sought out Clay:

LULA

I even got into this train, going some other way than mine.
Walked down the aisle...searching you out.

(Dutchman, 217)

The basic dramatic action of the play appears to dehistoricize the tension between white/black sexual interactions.

⁵³⁸ Celia McGee, “A Return to Rage, Played out in Black and White,” *New York Times*, January 14, 2007, A4.

⁵³⁹ Henry Louis Gates Jr., “The Power of Her Sex, the Power of Her Race,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1996, BR3.

⁵⁴⁰ Floyd James Davis, *Who Is Black? One Nation’s Definition* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991).

Baraka introduced the sexual enticement in the drama early on:

LULA
 Weren't you staring at me through the window? At the last stop?
 style="text-align: center;">CLAY
 Staring at you? What do you mean?
 style="text-align: center;">LULA
 Don't you know what staring means?
 style="text-align: center;">CLAY
 I saw you through the window...if that's what it means. I don't
 know if I was staring. Seems to me you were staring through the
 window at me.
 style="text-align: center;">LULA
 I was. But only after I'd turned around and saw you staring
 through that window down in the vicinity of my ass and legs.
(Dutchman, 217)

Ultimately, Lula stripped Clay of his racial identity, but in the process, she toyed with shunning the purity attached to white women. While Lula was connected to the ideology of white womanhood, a concept of white women's racial identity from the Antebellum period (the characteristics of goodness, purity, and innocence), she did not invest in that. This revolutionary aspect of the drama challenged the audience to forgo an invested tension in a white woman/black man sexual liaison. To get Clay to surrender to the rapture of their experience, she allowed him (and the audience) to know that her body was available to him. The heightened stakes and the political significance of Lula's suggesting her availability to Clay, a black man, meant that she was debunking the earliest myth of the sexually uncontrollable black man. This was a freewheeling world in which the white woman plays on a field of equality. Sex was the feature that maintained that the black man is not socially inferior to the white woman. What the drama says about sexuality between opposite racial partners was separated from what society had dictated. This was a white woman talking to a black man about looking at her *ass*. Many were shocked and others voiced dissatisfaction at even the premise of such talk. Here it existed for audiences to experience. Lula's sexual thoughts still offered a threat to the natural order of

racism--to a settled racial hierarchy. It must be kept in mind that the white/black sexual liaison in *Dutchman* was ahead of its time. Lula, while not considering her act controversial, did not shy away from the endgame of a sexual initiation; she indicated that her sexualized ritual had the potential of going the full distance with Clay:

	CLAY
Man, this subway is slow.	
	LULA
Yeah, I know.	
	CLAY
Well, go on. We were talking about my manhood.	
	LULA
We still are. All the time.	
	CLAY
We were in your living room.	
	LULA
My dark living room. Talking endlessly.	
	CLAY
About my manhood.	
	LULA
I'll make you a map of it. Just as soon as we get to my house.	
	CLAY
Well, that's great.	
	LULA
One of the things we do while we talk. And screw.	
	CLAY
<i>(Trying to make his smile broader and less shaky)</i>	
We finally got there.	

(Dutchman, 225)

While for Clay the sex is the desired ultimate outcome, Lula exploits the sexual nuances but is not there for a sexual quest. Lula is an independent agent, acting purely in the interests of her task. Clay, who is not the oversexed black man, was not supposed to challenge whiteness. Lula was the white Bohemian tempter and Clay was the black Baudelaire with a tamed masculinity. The very threat and anxiety produced because of black/white sexual interaction were to be controlled, submerged under a politics that exemplified transgression. Thus, the

alliance between Lula and Clay was not a forced situation but a voluntary alliance between a man and a woman, not a racialized encounter with its historical impediments.

Despite the apparent disregard for history, history surfaces in their lives and reinforces a narrative that negotiates their journey. This journey starts with Lula's gradual vitriolic racist spillage and escalates as the subway accelerates through the tunnel. Lula matches the velocity with her own sexualized foray into histrionics, testing the limit of her sexual transgression:

LULA

(Grabbing for his hands, which he draws away) Come on, Clay. Let's rub bellies on the train. The nasty. The nasty. Do the gritty grind, like your ol' rag-head mammy. Grind till you lose your mind. Shake it, shake it, shake it, shake it. OOOOweeer! Come on, Clay. Let's do the choo-choo train shuffle, the navel scratcher.

(Dutchman, 227)

Clay ends Lula's rampage with his own vituperative outburst, starting out by labeling her a whore.

CLAY

You great liberated whore! You fuck some black man, and right away you're an expert on black people. What a lotta shit that is. The only thing you know is that you come if he bangs you hard enough. And that's all. The belly rub? You wanted to do the belly rub? Shit, you don't even know how. You don't know how. That ol' dipty-dip shit you do, rolling your ass like an elephant. That's not my kind of belly rub. Belly rub is not Queens. Belly rub is dark places, with big hats and overcoats held up with one arm. Belly rub hates you.

(Dutchman, 229)

Seduction is an endeavor that can be simple, straightforward, or complex. With Lula, it was complex because it revealed the many facets of her character. Lula was charming, Bohemian, diabolic, charismatic, tempting, malicious, vicious, fascinating, sexually captivating, and dangerous--all simultaneously. Clay is one person in *Dutchman* until his major monologue; he then unmask and becomes the real Clay. However, Lula is constantly changing. She embodies many characteristics, all of them to keep Clay off balance. The stage directions in *Dutchman*

note several instances when Clay is stunned, embarrassed, shocked, or baffled by something that Lula did. It did not matter if she threw an apple core out the window of the moving train, danced in the aisle of the train, grabbed his inner thigh, or taunted him with racial epithets; it was all done to provoke Clay while confusing him. He actually thought Lula was an actress:

CLAY
You act like you're on television already.
LULA
That's because I'm an actress.
CLAY
I thought so.

(*Dutchman*, 222)

Lula then goes on to convince Clay that she is no actress. Before the actress incident, she had informed him that she lied a lot because it helped her control the world.⁵⁴¹ Lula is out to control Clay and she will do what is necessary. That explains the ever-changing Lula, who can be diabolic and cunning at the same time that she is enticing and captivating.

One of the essential components that the Civil Rights Movement drew on was that of black identity. Of the collective shared characteristics associated with it, the central model of identity was that of its cultural representation. Alain Locke argued back in the 1920s that "The cultural history of the Negro is as unique and dramatic as his social history,"⁵⁴² recognizing that blacks had made significant contributions to America's culture. Despite the fact that contributions of African Americans have touched every aspect of American life, the pathological response of many whites has been that of Lula's, dismissing the contributions of blacks. Central to the politics of Baraka and Black Nationalists was finding the means to facilitate the cultural arm of

⁵⁴¹ Baraka, *Dutchman*, 226.

⁵⁴² Alain Locke, "The Negro's Contribution to American Art and Literature" in "The American Negro," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140 (November 1928): 234; also see Locke's "The Negro's Contribution to American Culture," in "The Present and Future Position of the Negro in the American Social Order," *Journal of Negro Education* 3 (July 1939).

the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, Baraka stressed a black cultural identity that required commitment. Clay was isolated and did not have a sense of belonging to his culture; more accurately, his lack of loyalty and commitment to his cultural identity was apparent. Lula, fierce, diabolical, and unrelenting in her castigation, rejection, and disrespect, forced Clay to commit to and acknowledge his cultural identity. Lula's indictment of Clay's culture, mocking the blues, was in keeping with the misrepresentation, denying or ignoring the cultural contributions of blacks. Lula dances down the aisle of the subway hysterically, offering a rendition of a madness she associates with the blues.

LULA

And that's how the blues was born. Yes. Yes. Son of a bitch, get out of the way. Yes. Quack. Yes. Yes. And that's how the blues was born. Ten little niggers sitting on a limb, but none of them ever looked like him. (*Points to CLAY, returns toward the seat, with her hands extended for him to rise and dance with her*) And that's how blues was born. Yes. Come on, Clay. Let's do the nasty. Rub bellies. Rub bellies.

(*Dutchman*, 227)

By mocking the blues, Lula was striking at the heart of black identity. Stanley Crouch goes directly to the point when he states, "One cannot speak of Negro culture in this country without speaking of the blues."⁵⁴³ Baraka, of course, had written an important book on the blues.

It is not an overstatement to assert that the blues are indigenous to black culture; two other black theatre artists made the blues central to their work. James Baldwin exiled himself to the mountains of Switzerland to stabilize his psychological foundation, "armed with two Bessie Smith records and a typewriter."⁵⁴⁴ He regained his composure and reconnected to his cultural identity, which gave him the strength to persevere. The blues gave August Wilson an imaginative world that resulted in his ten-play cycle. Bessie Smith and a typewriter did for

⁵⁴³ Stanley Crouch, *The All-American Skin Game, or, The Decoy of Race: The Long and Short of It, 1990-1994* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 10.

⁵⁴⁴ Paul Richard, "An Elusive Quarry, the Blues Singer," *Washington Post*, August 11, 1966, A26.

Wilson exactly what it did for Baldwin. Wilson accidentally came across Bessie Smith while buying old records and after he listened to her sing “Nobody in Town Can Bake a Sweet Jelly Roll like Mine,” he stated that he “felt that someone was talking directly to me. I discovered through her singing an image of myself.”⁵⁴⁵

Thus, when Lula repudiated Clay’s cultural identifier, she attacked the core of his existence. Clay fought back with vengeful zeal, referencing Bessie Smith--as had Baldwin and Wilson--with his own repressed murderous instinct. His outburst was his way to legitimize his cultural identity:

CLAY

Old bald-headed four-eyed ofays popping their fingers...and don’t know yet what they’re doing. They say, “I love Bessie Smith.” And don’t even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, “Kiss my ass, kiss my black unruly ass.” Before love, suffering, desire, anything you can explain, she’s saying, and very plainly, “kiss my black ass.” And if you don’t know that, it’s you that’s doing the kissing. ...If Bessie Smith had killed some white people she wouldn’t have needed that music. She could have talked very straight and plain about the world. No metaphors. No grunts. No wiggles in the dark of her soul. Just straight two and two are four. Money. Power. Luxury. Like that. All of them. Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity.

(Dutchman, 229)

Clay suggests that he functions as an agent to sublimate rage; in essence, the blues serve as a substitute for murder. Without Clay’s connection and commitment to his cultural identity, he would forever be at the mercy of white America.

Stuart Hall argues that cultural identity “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time and culture. Cultural identifiers come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being

⁵⁴⁵ Samuel Freedman, “A Playwright Talks about the Blues,” *New York Times*, April 13, 1984, C3.

externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power.”⁵⁴⁶

Lula denied Clay’s culture value at the time when the argument was gaining strength that black culture must be valued as an organized entity different from white culture and just as valuable. This positive model of a distinct black culture was linked to the emerging theoretical trends of black militancy--Clay proved himself to be a product of black militancy. Clay was also connected directly to Baraka. Al Freeman, who created the role and portrayed Clay in the movie version of *Dutchman*, stated:

Clay was his beginning. Roi wrote three plays, as far as I know, that were a trilogy. All of them were thinly disguised autobiographies. Clay was LeRoi Jones, a very intellectual young man, middle class, who dressed in Brooks Brothers jackets and all that stuff. He wrote *The Toilet* before that. The young man in it was a poet in high school who came into conflict with his black peers because a young white man had given him a note that said he was beautiful. The note was intercepted, and he had to beat up the white boy, which he did. But at the end of the play, after the fight, which satisfied his black peers, he gets a towel and starts to minister to the boy’s wounds. So, what he was saying in the play, which is filled with all kinds of foul, young-boy language and has a very haunting ending, is, “Let us be who we are. We can live together. We will defend ourselves but that’s not who we are. We’re poets. We are artistic. We are philosophical, and we are spiritual. We are all of those things.” That is the same character, now grown up, who Clay is. Clay became that character. You know that big speech at the end of the play where Clay says, “You don’t know us. You appropriate stature from our culture, you assimilate them, and then you degrade us with your understanding of who you think we are. You better leave us alone because we might unleash all of this fury and rage that we have amassed over the centuries at being treated the way you have treated us, and that influenced your women who are appropriating our masculinity for their own pleasure—their own desire—trying to emasculate us.” Therefore, it was really about black manhood. That’s who that character was.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁶ Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, eds. *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 136.

⁵⁴⁷ Al Freeman Jr., interview with author (December 5, 2007).

As stated, *Dutchman* (like Baraka and Malcolm X) is immersed in the mythology of black militancy and black identity. Clay's transformation is from that of a self-identified black Baudelaire in a three-button assimilationist suit to that of a self-assured black man who calls on the black spirit of Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker. Clay's militancy reared its head at that exact point when he had exhausted his protests, forcing him to deliver a heartfelt warning to Lula that galvanized the attention of the audience:

CLAY

...though, one more thing. And you tell this to your father, who's probably the kind of man who needs to know at once. So he can plan ahead. Tell him not to preach so much rationalism and cold logic to these niggers. Let them alone. Let them sing curses at you in code and see your filth as simple lack of style. Don't make the mistake, through some irresponsible surge of Christian charity, of talking too much about the advantages of Western rationalism, or the great intellectual legacy of the white man, or maybe they'll begin to listen. And then, maybe one day, you'll find they actually do understand exactly what you are talking about, all these fantasy people. All these blues people. And on that day, as sure as shit, when you really believe you can "accept" them into your fold, as half-white trustees late of the subject peoples. With no more blues, except the very old ones, and not a watermelon in sight, the great missionary heart will have triumphed, and all of those ex-coons will be stand-up Western men, with eyes for clean hard useful lives, sober, pious and sane, and they'll murder you. They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own. They'll cut your throats, and drag you out to the edge of your cities so the flesh can fall away from your bones, in sanitary isolation.

(*Dutchman*, 230)

In this most definitive passage of his rage-induced outburst, Clay reveals the pure pumping black heart that Lula was seeking. He ventured into Black Nationalist terrain, rejecting the middle-class status while articulating an emerging ethos. The warning was not only notification of a black cultural ideology coming into being; it was substantially against the authority—anti the social system continuing on its path.

Clay's warning to Lula echoed the politics of the time. There were constant warnings issued by blacks to whites, revealing the disaffection of blacks about white America while calling for whites to understand the seriousness of the racial crisis.⁵⁴⁸ It is quite natural for a group placed in unjust social, political, and economic predicaments to develop resentment against the group in power. Such was the case for blacks, who harbored deep bitterness against whites. Even mild-mannered Lorraine Hansberry warned of the incipient violence when she captured the mood of the time by stating, "We feel we want to fight somebody. We want to knock the hell out of somebody."⁵⁴⁹ One noted sociologist was on target when he spoke of a "revolution which threatens to rend our society into bitterly hostile racial factions which may never be reconciled again."⁵⁵⁰

Clay's death dramatized a warning for whites; it was also a warning to alert blacks. Baraka warned blacks that if they did not resist or refuse the white-constructed fantasy of them, they would continue to fall prey to the cyclical reality that put an end to Clay's life. Most noticeable, Clay's outburst revealed a seething anger, a black rage, which was invading black communities.

Black Rage and Its Message

It could be said that anger was the underlying emotion of this period. Noted Louis Phillips:

Anger is a real emotion, even frenetic anger, and the anger that the black man feels toward the white, and the anger that the white feels toward the black, is one of the very real emotions present in America.⁵⁵¹

But this anger was often suppressed, especially among black men. Baraka did not tap into Clay's rage because it was exceptional; it was indigenous to a large segment of black men in America.

⁵⁴⁸ See: M. S. Handler, "Negro Bitterness Said to Increase," *New York Times*, February 10, 1964, 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Colin Legum, "The Negro Revolt," *Observer*, August 25, 1963, 6.

⁵⁵⁰ Emma Harrison, "Race Moderation Urged for Nation," *New York Times*, May 30, 1964, 14.

⁵⁵¹ Louis Phillips, "LeRoi Jones and Contemporary Black Drama," 210.

Repressed rage existed in black men who collectively felt trapped within the social expectations of *blackness*. Two prominent contemporary black scholars argued that black rage was concealed in the past to “assuage white fear and anxiety,”⁵⁵² something acknowledged by Jerry Watts:

The repressed rage of blacks is not unknown to whites. Whites merely demand that such anger remains repressed, for all that matters to them is how blacks navigate public space. When such rage is publicly articulated, whites will respond in a repressive manner, perhaps even murder.⁵⁵³

What Baraka did was to contextualize issues and emotions of the time to reveal Clay’s psychological landscape. Baraka showed Clay’s rage to be an ineluctable product of America’s pervasive and destructive racism. (Another important play of the era that not only prepared the landscape for *Dutchman* but also investigated black rage was Jean Genet’s *The Blacks*, which prompted one critic to brand the dramatist a “prophet of rage.”⁵⁵⁴ More about *The Blacks* later.)

The smoldering rage attributed to Clay began to receive psychiatric and sociological recognition several years after the initial production of *Dutchman*. Poussaint, in an article that covers Clay’s psychological characteristics, analyzes conditions that societal racism imposed on black rage. He argues, “Nonassertiveness was a learned adaptation to insure survival.”⁵⁵⁵ Addressing the issue of rage, Poussaint avows, “Negroes had little choice but to bear the psychological burden of suppressing and repressing their rage and aggression.”⁵⁵⁶ He goes on, “Another legitimate means of channeling rage is to identify with the oppressor and put all one’s energy into striving to be like him.”⁵⁵⁷ Clay was nonassertive, suppressed his rage, and thought of himself as Baudelaire. The opposite method to control the black rage phenomenon, according to Poussaint, was to:

⁵⁵² Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Cornel West, *The Future of the Race* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 84.

⁵⁵³ Watts, *Amiri Baraka*, 71.

⁵⁵⁴ Howard Taubman, “Theatre: *The Blacks* by Genet,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1961, 23.

⁵⁵⁵ Poussaint, “A Negro Psychiatrist,” 56.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 75

...identify with someone like himself who for one reason or another is free to express rage directly at the oppressor. This phenomenon would account for the immense popularity among Negroes of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell and Malcolm X. They were both willing to “tell the white man like it is” and did so, for a while at least, with apparent impunity.⁵⁵⁸

Baraka admitted that during the writing of *Dutchman*, he was under the influence of Malcolm X.⁵⁵⁹ While it was argued that Malcolm X awakened “black people’s moral outrage and consciousness to the persistence of racism, exploitation and psychological oppression in America,”⁵⁶⁰ Cornel West also noted that he was the prophet of black rage.⁵⁶¹ Clay might be seen as an extension of Baraka, for whom the rage and anger were real.

Clay’s rage-induced monologue signaled the beginning of a new attitude and the rejection of behavior that dates back to slavery. As Poussaint declared, “Old passivity is fading and being replaced by a drive to undo centuries of powerlessness, helplessness and dependency under American racism.” Poussaint goes on to add, “It appears that more and more Negroes are freeing themselves of suppressed rage through greater outspoken release of pent-up emotions.”⁵⁶² Poussaint indicates that rage was finally finding outlets during this period of social protest.

Dutchman exemplified black rage before Poussaint’s article was published in 1967. It also predated the publication of *Black Rage*, one of the seminal books of the twentieth century about the subject.⁵⁶³ That book argued that slavery, which had wounded the psyche of every black American, set up consequences that would manifest as black rage. During the 1960s, black rage manifested itself most openly in the riots. Inevitably, the struggle of the Civil Rights Movement had created a fierce racial consciousness that allowed African Americans to free themselves from

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁹ Baraka, interview.

⁵⁶⁰ Magnus O. Bassey, “What Is Africana Critical Theory or Black Existential Philosophy?” *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 6 (July 2007): 914.

⁵⁶¹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 136.

⁵⁶² Poussaint, “A Negro Psychiatrist,” 78. .

⁵⁶³ William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

self-imposed constraints. Clay's monologue not only connected to the emerging black rage, it was also a breakthrough moment in American theatre. Baraka communicated black rage to theatre audiences in a more powerful and direct way than anyone before him. Through the mechanisms of theatre he focused attention on black rage and forced audiences to acknowledge its presence. Kenneth Clark noted,

It is quite unlikely that any reasonably intelligent American did not know that racism permeates our society and that the victims of racism would be angry and frustrated and would, therefore, seek a variety of rational and irrational, personal and collective forms of escape, accommodation or experiment with many forms of revolt. These truths are as old as human cruelty and oppression.⁵⁶⁴

Although Martin Luther King stated "Negroes could contain their rage when they found the means to force relatively radical changes,"⁵⁶⁵ Robin Kelley asserted that "the need to vent our rage" during the 1960s was necessary.⁵⁶⁶ It was a revolutionary phase and rage is a significant part of a revolution.

Revolutionizing: Artaud and Baraka (the Avant-garde Spirit)

Baraka and *Dutchman* were rooted in the spirit of revolution and the avant-garde. James Farmer, national director of CORE, acknowledged the revolutionary spirit that had engulfed the Civil Rights Movement:

The mood and the tempo of the entire Civil Rights Movement has been radically changing for some time and this change is now felt by every Negro in America, not only by those who have physically participated in the struggle. It is a revolutionary spirit which has caught up even those who not long ago were apathetic and uninvolved in the movement.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁴ Kenneth Clark, "As Old as Human Cruelty," *New York Times*, September 22, 1968, 373.

⁵⁶⁵ Martin L. King Jr., "The Role of the Behavioral Scientist in the Civil Rights Movement," *American Psychologist* 23, no. 3 (March 1968): 180-186.

⁵⁶⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

⁵⁶⁷ James Farmer, "Changing Mood of the Civil Rights," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 27, 1965, 19. [Also see: C. Vann Woodward, "After Watts--Where Is the Negro Revolution Headed?" *New York Times*, August 29, 1965, SM24.]

The revolutionary spirit motivated Baraka's move from Greenwich Village to Harlem and ultimately to Newark. Baraka understood that his village Bohemianism was not compatible with his emerging political commitment to radical black politics--black cultural nationalism. His credibility was already in question because of his white wife. (Malcolm X's position on the interracialism--black man/white woman liaison--was well known.⁵⁶⁸) Thus, Baraka's break from his past associations confirmed that a peaceful coexistence could not occur between whites and blacks. That concept is central to *Dutchman*. Lula's message to Clay was that coexistence could only exist on her terms, or else it would not exist at all. Baraka was clear about *Dutchman* being a drama that wanted to exist on its own terms, that Clay's outburst to Lula was an enthusiastic No! They could not coexist. His annihilation was inevitable. At the time, undermining black-white coalitions was a risky and bold move for a theatre artist.

The three civil rights plays previously discussed (*A Land Beyond the River*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, and *Purlie Victorious*) promoted an integrationist logic; *Dutchman* was in opposition to that logic. *Dutchman*, while dramatizing the condition of oppression, rejects the resolution imposed by traditional civil rights leaders. *Dutchman*'s political narrative is not as clear as one wishes; it is complex. Baraka has planted a seed. He warns blacks that they must be aware of Lula--she is

⁵⁶⁸ A Summing Up: Louis Lomax Interviews Malcolm X (1963), teachingamericanhistory.org.

LOMAX: Are you suggesting that all of us who fight for integration are after a white woman?

MALCOLM X: I wouldn't say all of you, but let the evidence speak for itself. Check up on these integration leaders, and you will find that most of them are either married to or hooked up with some white woman. Take that meeting between James Baldwin and Robert Kennedy; practically everybody there was interracially married. Harry Belafonte is married to a white woman; Lorraine Hansberry is married to a white man; Lena Horne is married to a white man. Now how can any Negro, man or woman, who sleeps with a white person speak for me? No black person married to a white person can speak for me!

LOMAX: Why?

MALCOLM X: Why? Because only a man who is ashamed of what he is will marry out of his race. There has to be something wrong when a man or a woman leaves his own people and marries somebody of another kind. Men who are proud of being black marry black women; women who are proud of being black marry black men.

coming for them. He had invigorated the sentiment rooted in Claude McKay's sonnet, *If We Must Die*.⁵⁶⁹

This fight-back spirit was very much part of the avant-garde spirit. In essence, Baraka suggested that there was an alternative to the civil rights rhetoric of the day. Clay's transcendence from the American mainstream spoke for the population that was unlike Lorraine Hansberry's character Walter Lee, who decided to move to the suburbs. Clay was among those who did not want integration or the suburban life, remaining firm to a common sentiment, "Who wants to integrate into a burning house."⁵⁷⁰ Clay did not wish to be the white *Negro* any longer.

The 1960s offered a variety of challenges to mainstream society and culture. Baraka espoused nothing short of a revolution:

The black artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely that other men will be moved...if they are white men, tremble, curse and go mad, because they will be drenched in the filth of their evil.⁵⁷¹

The statement was Baraka's way to sharpen the cultural and political consciousness of blacks.

To contextualize *Dutchman*, it is important to identify the play that paved the way for *Dutchman*. Jean Genet's *The Blacks*, a drama at the forefront of this rapid transformation of racial awareness, provided inspiration for black dramatists. It contained an accessible message

⁵⁶⁹ If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen, we must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

⁵⁷⁰ Boris Weintraub, "Urban League Official Lists Negro Stands, Views Differ: Aims Are the Same," *Chicago Tribune*, June 15, 1963, A8.

⁵⁷¹ VIC, "Jones' Plays Designed to Offend," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 27, 1965, D3.

and had the right dramatic qualities, artistically innovative while challenging convention and tapping into, addressing, and embracing the explosive racial politics of the Civil Rights Movement era.

Genet, a Frenchman who gained literary prominence in France as a poet, essayist, novelist, and dramatist, had lived a notorious life as a thief, beggar, and homosexual prostitute. He had been thrown out of several countries and served time in more than ten jails before his thirty-fifth birthday. He was sentenced to life in prison—for a crime he had not committed—but due to a petition sponsored by many influential Parisians (particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, Pablo Picasso, and Jean Cocteau), he received a presidential pardon in 1948. After that, Genet devoted himself to literature, the theatre, the arts, and different political and social causes. The Black Panthers invited him to the United States in 1970; he stayed for several months and was involved in the Panthers' politics and activities. Thus, the complexities of his life—he started out as an orphan—categorized him as an outcast.

Genet's political themes, attitude, and literary material (his admiration of crimes and criminals, respect for thievery, acceptance of corrupting influences, and blatant disregard for conventional social values) shocked and repulsed people. The uneducated ex-convict (who was extremely well read) published poems, essays, and five novels, one a fictionalized autobiography, made two movies, had ballets based on his work, and wrote several well-received plays. The best known are *The Maids* (1954), *The Balcony* (1957), *The Blacks* (1957, produced in 1959), and *The Screens* (1961). One critic noted, "Genet turned to the theatre for the presentation of his radical views of the world. Perhaps because of his obsession with religion, the theatre proved a better vehicle for his ideas and techniques than did the novel, since the theatrical

experience is, by definition and tradition, a form of ceremony, a rite.”⁵⁷² *The Blacks*, a play within a play, is an attack on bourgeois values. The drama, with an all-black cast playing black and white characters in masks, offers for a white aristocratic court the symbolic reenactment of the murder of a white woman by a black man. The dramatic action--the trial of the murderer is actually a diversion; the real crime is that of a black traitor's execution--occurs offstage.

The Blacks, with its innovative techniques, challenged the audience. Blacks are preparing to act a clown show for the benefit of a white audience, saying, we are not the stereotypes, "This is how we see you." It celebrates the ritual in which blacks reenact, each night, the rape and murder of a white woman by a black as they laugh at whites. The play, which was timely and tapped into a radical black politics, was a great success in America during the early 1960s. Despite the fact that many blacks saw *The Blacks* as a valid expression of black liberation, it did receive criticism from within the black community, notably by Lorraine Hansberry. Despite the objections of Hansberry and others to *The Blacks*, Hill acknowledged the essence of the play when he stated, "Although it has been criticized as nihilistic and anti-Negro, the play seemed to me to capture the spirit of the times in America.”⁵⁷³

As early as 1955, Americans had an opportunity to see Genet's *The Maids*. In 1957, a group of students at Harvard presented Genet's *Deathwatch*.⁵⁷⁴ *Deathwatch* opened at a downtown theatre in Manhattan in 1958.⁵⁷⁵ Although the Lord Chamberlain banned Genet's *The Balcony* from London's West End in 1957, it opened Off-Broadway in 1960.⁵⁷⁶ Therefore, by the time *The Blacks* opened in 1961, the American audience was well aware of Genet. *The Blacks*, the

⁵⁷² Contemporary Authors: Jean Genet: Gale Literary Databases; galenet.galegroup.com

⁵⁷³ Hill, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Black Drama," 424.

⁵⁷⁴ "Genet Play Is Staged," *New York Times*, March 7, 1957, 25.

⁵⁷⁵ Louis Calta, "Theatre: Deathwatch," *New York Times*, October 10, 1958, 34.

⁵⁷⁶ Arthur Gelb, "Genet's 'Balcony' Opens on Feb. 28," *New York Times*, February 8, 1960, 37. [Also see: Brooks Atkinson, "Work by Genet Opens at Circle in Square," *New York Times*, March 4, 1960, 21.]

drama that everyone from Harold Clurman to Herbert Blau called a masterpiece,⁵⁷⁷ opened and created a phenomenal sensation.

The Blacks conveyed a revolutionary zeal, encouraging blacks to stand up for equality. In fact, *Dutchman* drew its energy from what *The Blacks* initiated. This is to propose that when Susan Sontag argued, “There is a smell of a new, rather verbose style of emotional savagery in *Dutchman* that, for want of a better name, I should have to call Albeesque,”⁵⁷⁸ she would have been more on target to have called it Genetian. The influence of *The Blacks* on *Dutchman* is uncanny. For example, not only did both plays attempt to transform society by tapping into the spirit of their times, both took on the theme of racism, anchored their dramas in a revolutionary foundation, offered a warning to a white audience, and provided a ritual of a murder: *The Blacks* offered the ritual murder of a white woman by a black man and *Dutchman*, that of a black man by a white woman.

Genet provided a conceptual base for Baraka’s innovative aesthetics while preparing audiences for an alternative political outrageousness. He primed them for the assault both on the political system and on themselves. Mel Gussow confirms that *The Blacks* serves as a link between Baraka and his predecessors:

Influenced by Verlaine, Rimbaud, Pirandello, Sartre and perhaps most of all Antonin Artaud (and his Theater of Cruelty), Genet, in turn, has affected playwrights of his time and later, including Eugene Ionesco, Fernando Arrabal, Amiri Baraka and Peter Weiss.⁵⁷⁹

Although Genet stimulated and negotiated a space for Baraka, it was the artistic ideology of Artaud that provided the primary stimulus for Baraka’s dramatic foundation and influenced him

⁵⁷⁷ Kenneth Tynan, “Misliked for our Complexions,” *Observer*, June 4, 1961, 26.

⁵⁷⁸ Sontag, “Going to Theatre, Etc.,” 393.

⁵⁷⁹ Mel Gussow, “Jean Genet, the Playwright, Dies at 75,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1986, D25.

most. Genet also owed much to Artaud. He relied on mytho-poetic resources, rituals, the action of violence and cruelty, nonrealistic acting, and the circus atmosphere.

Gautam Dasgupta makes a crucial point when he argues, “Artaud’s dominance during the sixties was certainly abetted by factors that had to do with social issues as much as aesthetic ones.”⁵⁸⁰ That is particularly true in his influence on Baraka. Arnold Aronson points out that the “avant-garde often contains within itself the intentionally shocking and provocative.”⁵⁸¹ Shock is an implicit tool for Artaud in his notion of cruelty and his desire to reach spectators on a visceral level. Artaudian shock was central to much of Genet’s work;⁵⁸² it was also present in Baraka’s *Dutchman*. Lula’s killing of Clay was a shock to many audience members; Clay’s vitriolic tirade against white America was equally so to many. Yet Baraka, while acknowledging his debt to Artaud, sought to utilize him on a more literally violent level.

When I read Artaud I liked his *Theater of Cruelty*, his statements, his theories. I thought they were interesting, but when I read them I wanted to use them in a different way than he used them. He seemed to want to commit violence on certain bourgeois intellectualism in a sense, and I wanted to transform that into actual violence on society itself, a society that I thought of as oppressive and racist.⁵⁸³

There is actually a reference to Artaud’s “Theater of Cruelty” in Baraka’s essay “In Search of the Revolutionary Theatre”:

It must show horrible coming attractions of The Crumbling of the West. Even as Artaud designed The Conquest of Mexico, so we must design The Conquest of White Eye, and show the missionaries and wiggly Liberals dying under blasts of concrete. For sound effects, wild screams of joy, from all the people of the world.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁰ Gautam Dasgupta, “Remembering Artaud,” *Performing Arts Journal* 19, no. 2 (May 1997): 2.

⁵⁸¹ Aronson, *American Avant-garde Theatre*, xi.

⁵⁸² I have actually seen productions where white audience members were shocked at the abuse and hostility heaped on them by the cast.

⁵⁸³ William J. Harris, “An Interview with Amiri Baraka (1980),” in *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*, ed. Charlie Reilly (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), 169-170.

⁵⁸⁴ LeRoi Jones, “In Search of the Revolutionary Theatre,” *Negro Digest* (April 1966): 22.

Many scholars and critics have regularly linked Artaud and Baraka irrespective of their differences:

[Jones and Artaud] both believed in the power of the theatre to effect revolutionary changes in human consciousness. Both artists advocated a theatre that would assault the spectators and awaken them to the need for change in their lives. In addition, they both espoused the concept of total theatre—a theatre in which all the arts would be used to draw the spectators into a life-changing experience.⁵⁸⁵

Theater in Artaud's view should challenge us, jolt us into action, and offer a new arena of sensibility. Baraka seems to have followed this directive in his own dramaturgy.⁵⁸⁶

Referring to Artaud, Charles Marowitz stated:

The cruelty that Artaud referred to (this is a truism worth repeating) did not refer exclusively to torture, blood, violence, and plague--but to the cruelest of all practices: the exposure of mind, heart, and nerve ends to the grueling truths behind a social reality that deals in psychological crises when it wants to be honest, and political evils when it wants to be responsible, but rarely if ever confronts the existential horror behind all social and psychological facades. This is where Artaud becomes practical and level-headed, because he declares: if we want to have a theatre that isn't trivial or escapist, we have to find a new way of operating such a theatre: a new way of generating the actor into action, the playwright into meaning, and the public into consciousness.⁵⁸⁷

Marowitz touches on the central connection to link Baraka to Artaud. It is not techniques of Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty* (sounds, cries, groans, gestures, lightning, or shocking aspects), it is Baraka's venturing into a new political area for a black dramatist, questioning the validity of the political system and the politics under which blacks are controlled. He is presenting the Artaudian theatre that is not there to show half-truths; he is providing the theatre with the raw

⁵⁸⁵ Elaine Isolyn Duval, *Theatre and the Double: Revolutionary Consciousness in Baraka and Artaud* (doctoral dissertation, University of Tennessee, 1988).

⁵⁸⁶ Rebhorn, "Flaying Dutchman," 799.

⁵⁸⁷ Charles Marowitz, "Notes on the Theatre of Cruelty," *Tulane Drama Review* 11, no 2 (Winter 1996): 152-172.

truth, forcing the audience to examine their prejudices through Lula's violence and Clay's dramatic action.

Artaud codified his philosophical precepts on theatre; they challenged conventional approaches and played a fundamental role in influencing major theatre figures. Artaud mapped out a path where Baraka could reject the status quo that had placed constraints on him. Artaud provided Baraka the moral and emotional support and encouragement to nurture his political radicalism. Thus, the avant-garde movement and the Civil Rights Movement gained because of the spirit that was awakened in Baraka.

Conclusion: Eyes on the Politics

In Clay's rage-induced fury, he expressed supposedly a truth about white America. His murderous rage stops short of the ultimate act, killing Lula. Sanity wins out over violence. Clay declares that murder would resolve the problem only to decide against it:

CLAY

When all it needs is the simple act. Murder. Just Murder! Would make us all sane. (*Suddenly weary*) Ahhh. Shit. But who needs it? I'd rather be a fool. Insane. Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts, urging me to new conquests.

(*Dutchman*, 230)

The decision to choose words over violence did not save Clay. Lula was lucid and her meaning precise: "I've heard enough." Clay's ephemeral rage had revealed his repressed feelings, exactly what Lula was seeking. Clay was off guard when the denouement occurs; Lula "brings up a small knife and plunges it into Clay's chest. Twice." With the murder, Lula reestablishes the system. The adversarial threat that Clay embodied is quelled. The social order will remain intact.

Before the murder, other whites join Lula on the subway.

CLAY

Wow. All these people, so suddenly. They must all come from the same place.

LULA

Right. That they do.

CLAY

Oh? You know about them too?

LULA

Oh, yeah. About them more than I know about you. Do they frighten you?

CLAY

Frighten me? Why should they frighten me?

LULA

'Cause you're an escaped nigger.

(Dutchman, 226)

After the murder, an act of violence that will be repeated symbolically again and again, Lula quickly engages the assistance of her white accomplices to help throw Clay's body off the train. The whites had ignored the killing—a collective complicity in murder--honoring a warfare paradigm: *us* against *them*.

Lula then readies herself for the next victim. Baraka introduces a copy of Clay:

(A young Negro of about twenty comes into the coach, with a couple of books under his arm. He sits a few seats in back of Lula. When he is seated, she turns and gives him a long slow look.)

(Dutchman, 231)

The event will repeat. Clay's death can be seen as a prophetic warning to those who did not wake up and resist the subjugation imposed on them, i.e., they are complicit in their own destruction. That is a tidy premise and explains the ending of the drama. Shut your eyes to history and it will repeat itself.

Then, there is the premise that men fight but lose the battle. In the battle, they die; but the thing they fought for comes about despite their defeat, and the men symbolically rise and go on to even greater success. This is what Baraka did with Clay in his poem "Clay":

*Killed
By a white woman*

*On a subway in 1964,
 he rose*
*to be the first negro congressman
 from missouri.
 we're not saying
 That being dead
 is the pre
 requisite
 for this honor
 but it certainly helped make him
 what he is
 today.*⁵⁸⁸

Baraka did not intend that Clay have a meaningless role in the emerging social and political order. Clay became a cultural agent, invading the Civil Rights Movement with force.

Dutchman was designed to communicate the politics of Malcolm X. Clay advanced political ideologies, which ranged from Malcolm X's rejection of integration to Baraka's attack on the black middle class.

Dutchman, deep in the politics of its time, became a dramatic model. It certainly enhanced the value of theatre by confirming that mainstream American theatre was a legitimate venue for political agitation to bring about social change. *Dutchman* was remarkably prescient, tackling issues that would inevitably become part of the Civil Rights Movement battle. It is necessary to stress that *Dutchman* was a powerful cultural agent at that historical moment when it mattered most. Furthermore, Baraka, one of the very few blacks to have gained access to a serious artistic circle, directed all of his energy and anger against a system to transform it just when the challenge was most daunting. Despite the controversy that surrounded the play, Hilton Als argues that "with *Dutchman*, Baraka changed the theatre forever."⁵⁸⁹ By resisting the status quo at that moment in history, Baraka played a substantial cultural role in the political transformations brought about because of the Civil Rights Movement.

⁵⁸⁸ Sollors, *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*, 133. [Note that Sollors argues *Dutchman* was a satirical attack on the black middle class.]

⁵⁸⁹ Hilton Als, "In Black and White: Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*," *New Yorker*, February 5, 2007, 78.

The question ultimately becomes: What is the significance of *Dutchman* to the Civil Rights Movement? *Dutchman* was a radical play, embodying both a new theatrical style and a new political agenda. In a very practical way it contributed to the funding of the Civil Rights Movement. The film version of *Dutchman* provided funding for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee,⁵⁹⁰ and proceeds from the West Coast premiere of *Dutchman* were donated to the Mississippi Freedom Fund.⁵⁹¹ It used the power and immediacy of theatre to present an alternative and oppositional force to the philosophy and strategies that were advocated, accepted, and praised by the major civil rights leaders and organizations. If King, the movement's foremost leader, embodies the synergy of nonviolence, integration, and racial compromise, then Malcolm X embodies a radical revolutionary Black Nationalism--exactly the opposite. While many identified with and promoted King's ideas, Malcolm X represented a theoretical shift away from them. He warned white Americans that black insurgency was also an option for blacks. This is the significance of *Dutchman*: it served notice to whites while offering a vision of a black-power collective identity that generated tangible pressure for social and political change. While rebuffing King and black leaders of his ilk, Baraka framed *Dutchman* in the politics of an emerging militant black consciousness. Thus, the cultural modality of *Dutchman*, along with its embedded politics, demanded and got the attention of white America and black civil rights leaders. Just as Malcolm X rejected the nonviolent and integrationist philosophies of the previous generation of civil rights leaders and organizations, Amiri Baraka rejected the analogous themes and tone of the previous generation of black dramatists.

⁵⁹⁰ "Cite *Dutchman* at SNCC Party," *New York Amsterdam News*, March 25, 1967, 16.

⁵⁹¹ "Jones's Play to Aid Fund," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1965, D13.

Chapter Five:

George Sklar's *And People All Around:*
Dramatizing the Vote

From the moment of emancipation, voting rights and the exercise of political power through the vote were issues of paramount importance to blacks and formerly enslaved Africans. Free blacks showed their concern for the vote and made an “address to the loyal citizens of the United States and to Congress” as early as 1865.⁵⁹² In 1911, the NAACP stated,

We hold as self-evident political truth that no men who are deprived of the right to vote can protect themselves against oppression and injustice. They cannot influence legislation or have a voice in selecting the tribunals by which their rights are determined, and the first step toward the advancement of the colored race is the recognition and protection of their right to vote.⁵⁹³

The right to vote and its attendant power had a long history for blacks before the era known as the Civil Rights Movement. Nonetheless, during the 1960s, voting rights for blacks became a central issue in the political battle over civil rights. Despite the fact that the 15th Amendment guaranteed all citizens the right to vote,⁵⁹⁴ there were discriminatory practices by registrars to keep blacks from voting. For example, eight states were specifically cited for denying blacks those rights: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.⁵⁹⁵ Many legal experts agreed that there were major obstacles:⁵⁹⁶ discriminatory application of voter-qualification tests, physical and economic coercions, subjective questions on Constitutional interpretation,⁵⁹⁷ and other specious tactics that were put in place to abridge and prevent blacks from exercising the right to vote. The fundamental spirit of discriminatory exclusion of blacks was captured in a spirited theatrical exchange between two senators in

⁵⁹² “The Late Convention of Colored Men; Address to the Loyal Citizens of the United States and to Congress,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1865.

⁵⁹³ *Crisis* 2, no. 1 (May 11, 1911): 24.

⁵⁹⁴ 15th Amendment: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

⁵⁹⁵ Russell Baker, “Rights Unit Asks Congress to Curb State Vote Test,” *New York Times*, September 10, 1961, 68.

⁵⁹⁶ Fred P. Graham, “Vote Bill Constitutional, Experts Say,” *New York Times*, March 21, 1965, 67.

⁵⁹⁷ Anthony Lewis, “Plan on Negro Voting Wins Strong Support,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1960, E17.

Congress, Hubert H. Humphrey and Allen J. Ellender,⁵⁹⁸ acknowledging that in many locations whites feared blacks would gain control if they could vote.

Irrespective of white fear, violence, tricks, loopholes, and registrars' systematic exclusion of blacks from the ballot box, many organizations began concerted efforts to overcome the numerous obstacles that denied the vote to blacks. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. announced in 1963 that the time had arrived to take on the "big job," the "Negro vote";⁵⁹⁹ over the next several years, voting rights became a central issue in the political battle over civil rights, culminating in a massive voter-registration campaign in the South.⁶⁰⁰ Black civil rights organizations and black leaders understood that the vote had become a vital mechanism to ensure a substantial effect on the political and economic outcomes affecting the lives of blacks.

⁵⁹⁸ E. W. Kenworthy, "Ellender Agrees Some Registrars Bar Negro Votes," *New York Times*, March 12, 1964, 23.

ELLENDER

It is true that in some states there are counties where the ratio of Negroes to whites is 2 to 1, and there is little or no registration. But why? For the reason that the few whites in those counties would be scared to death to have Negroes in charge of public office without qualification.

HUMPHREY

Then what the Senator from Louisiana is saying, in other words, is that while the whites are in the minority, they do prevent the colored majority from registering to vote?

ELLENDER

I do.

HUMPHREY

How does the Senator justify that under the Constitution? The Constitution is rather explicit, Senator, on those terms.

ELLENDER

I understand that, but they [the registrars] do not apply it. I am not saying they [the Negroes] should not be registered, but I am giving the Senator the reason why. If this happened in the state of Minnesota, the Senator from Minnesota would do the same thing.

HUMPHREY

No...

ELLENDER

The Senator from Minnesota has not lived among them... I am frank to say that in many instances the reason why the voting rights were not -- I will not say denied, but not made possible -- is that the white people in those counties who are in the minority are afraid they would be outvoted. Let us be frank about it.

⁵⁹⁹ "Votes Drive Next, Dr. King Promises," *New York Times*, September 1, 1963, 44.

⁶⁰⁰ In the spring of 1962, a comprehensive push was set in motion to increase Negro registration. Under the leadership of the Voter Education Project of the Southern Regional Council, several organizations participated: the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Urban League, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Congress of Racial Equality, and numerous independent state and local groups. Various "citizenship schools" and "voter clinics" were established. A grass-roots campaign was initiated throughout the South. For more see: Samuel DuBois Cook, "Political Movements and Organizations," *Journal of Politics* 26, no. 1 (February 1964): 130-153.

The political upheavals of the 1960s made clear that securing the right to vote for blacks was essential in order for America to live up to its democratic ideals. The issues galvanized artists and writers, including playwright and novelist George Sklar. Sklar, who had been a significant political dramatist in the 1930s, had not written a play since the late 1940s, but in response to the murder of three civil rights activists in Mississippi in 1964, he wrote *And People All Around*. The central event of the play is a fictionalized version of the murder of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, the three civil rights activists (two white and one black) who were working on the voter registration campaign, one of the most successful achievements for blacks during the Civil Rights Movement era. The charged politics of the period was reflected in numerous dramas by both black and white dramatists. One critic noted, “A growing number of playwrights--Negro and white--are writing about the Negro today.”⁶⁰¹ Sklar, a white playwright, tackled perhaps the most charged issue of that dramatic era in *And People All Around*. This chapter explores how Sklar’s drama championed the rights of blacks to vote while bridging a social-theatrical connection to the Civil Rights Movement.

George Sklar: His 1930s Political Sensibility

Sklar was not only a playwright but also a screenwriter and a novelist. Sklar took a playwriting class at Columbia University⁶⁰² before he graduated from Yale University (in 1929), where he had studied playwriting with George Pierce Baker. He was one of the founders of the Theatre Union, where his first plays were produced during the Great Depression. The Theatre

⁶⁰¹ Milton Esterow, “New Role of Negroes in Theatre Reflects Ferment of Integration,” *New York Times*, June 15, 1964, 1. [Michael Shurtleff (*Call Me by My Rightful Name*), Harold Willis (*A Sound of Silence*), and Martin Duberman (*In White America*) are only three of the white playwrights who garnered attention before Sklar by dramatizing issues that related to the black experience.]

⁶⁰² Alan M. Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 80.

Union “emerged out of the workers’ theatre movement”⁶⁰³ but was also designated as the “most famous American socialist theatre.”⁶⁰⁴ It had earned the reputation for embracing dramas that incorporated and promoted social and political change. Although Theatre Union was an active political theatre of the era, it was not the only one.⁶⁰⁵ Within the cultural tradition of the 1930s, the Theatre Union occupied a space that attempted to offer theatre as a civil agency for all people. Its mission statement proclaimed:

We produce plays that deal boldly with the deep-going social conflicts, the economic, emotional and cultural problems that confront the majority of the people. Our plays speak directly to this majority, whose lives usually are caricatured or ignored on the stage. We do not expect that these plays will fall into the accepted social patterns. This is a new kind of professional theatre, based on the interests and hopes of the great mass of working people.⁶⁰⁶

Sklar, a socially conscious dramatist, coauthored four protest plays that opened at the Theatre Union between 1932 and 1935: *Merry-Go-Round* (1932) and *Peace on Earth* (1933), both with Albert Maltz; *Stevedore* (1934) and *Parade* (1935), both with Paul Peters. Sklar’s *Life and Death of an American* (1939) was the last production staged by the Federal Theatre Project.

During the 1940s, Sklar worked in Los Angeles writing screenplays, including collaboration with Vera Caspary on a stage adaptation of her popular suspense novel, *Laura*. *Laura*, which opened on Broadway at the Cort Theater in 1947, was a highly successful movie before its stage version. Although Sklar coauthored many screenplays in the 1940s, he was blacklisted for his political views during the McCarthy era of the 1950s.

⁶⁰³ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997), 67.

⁶⁰⁴ Lee Baxandall, “Brecht in America, 1935,” *TDR* 12, no. 1 (Autumn 1967): 69.

⁶⁰⁵ Other theatres of that era, some labeled as left-wing political theatre, are Workers Laboratory Theatre (1930), later known as Theatre of Action; Cheryl Crawford, Lee Strasberg, and Harold Clurman’s Group Theatre (1931); League of Workers’ Theatre (1932); Theatre Union, founded in 1933; Federal Theatre Project (1935), a wing of the WPA; and John Houseman and Orson Welles’s Mercury Theatre (1937).

⁶⁰⁶ Morgan Himmelstein, *Drama Was a Weapon: The Left-Wing Theatre in New York 1929-1941* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963), 55.

After 1947, Sklar did not return to the theatre until 1966 with *And People All Around*. His last play, *Brown Pelican* (1972), was about the impact of an ecological crisis on birds. Sklar also wrote four novels between 1947 and 1962: *The Two Worlds of Johnny Truro* (1947); *The Promising Young Men* (1951); *The Housewarming* (1953); and *The Identity of Dr. Frazier* (1962). Unlike Sklar's plays, the novels were not as grounded in politics.⁶⁰⁷

Sklar's ideological commitment and connection to civil rights causes had been evident as early as 1934 with *Stevedore*, perhaps his best-known play of the era. Although Sklar was a white playwright, he was an artist who had earned the approval of blacks with *Stevedore* by dramatizing an issue that was vital to their experience. The mostly black-cast social drama revealed the intricacies of how a race riot in New Orleans occurred when a black stevedore, mainly because of his role as a union organizer, was framed for an assault on a white woman. After escaping from the police, the black protagonist, Lonnie Thompson,⁶⁰⁸ goes on to rally blacks to defend themselves against a white mob that plans to burn down their neighborhood. Thompson is shot but his white coworkers come to help him fend off the white mob. This is a progressive dramaturgy of black and white unity and the labor movement in support of decent treatment of blacks.

The dramaturgical material of *Stevedore* was gathered from a wide array of relevant events; the program notes stated:

It is based on incidents, which occurred during the attacks on Negroes in East St. Louis in 1919, the Chicago attacks in 1919, the Dr. Sweet case in Detroit, the Bogalusa lumber strike, the New Orleans dock strikes, the Colorado bathing beach fight, the attack

⁶⁰⁷ *Merry-Go-Round* (exposé of the corrupt politics of a large city); *Peace on Earth* (an anti-war drama); *Parade* (left-wing musical revue of satirical sketches on political themes); *Life and Death of an American* (a drama about a worker killed in the Memorial Day massacre during the South Chicago strike of 1937). The plays often dealt with and involved politics, whereas the novels did not. For example, *The Two Worlds of Johnny Truro* is about a high school student who falls in love with an older woman.

⁶⁰⁸ Jack Carter played the role of Lonnie Thompson. Of course, *Stevedore* had the best black actors: Leigh Whipper, Georgette Harvey, Edna Thomas, Rex Ingram, etc. Paul Robeson starred in the 1935 London production.

on the Camp Hill, Ala., share croppers and the similar attack at Tuscaloosa, Ala.⁶⁰⁹

The authors were well aware of the history and had tapped into and dramatized a significant contemporary issue with social and political legitimacy.

Theatre of that period was a segregated affair, reflecting the prevailing practices and attitudes toward blacks. Segregation, as discrimination, was inevitable in the theatre; it was a by-product of entrenched racism. While the majority of commercial theatres did have segregated sections for blacks, some theatres refused to admit blacks altogether.⁶¹⁰ Segregation in the Theatre Union did not exist. Sklar emphasized that aspect while arguing that *Stevedore* was not only the play that inspired Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty*, it also received recognition for being the first in which orchestra seats were opened to blacks in popular theatres.⁶¹¹ That unprecedented practice did not go unnoticed. Brooks Atkinson, in his review, observed: "Many Negroes were in the audience last night, both downstairs and up."⁶¹² Michael Denning also noted that *Stevedore* "broke the unwritten segregation of New York's orchestra seats."⁶¹³

The elimination of discrimination was even more pronounced behind the scenes as well. Black actors were surprised to discover "that there was no discrimination backstage at all; they and the white actors got the same pay, shared the same dressing rooms and were treated with utter equality by the director and the production committee as well as the executive board."⁶¹⁴ Other legendary black-issue plays of that time were not as progressive—for example, *The Green Pastures*, which was accused of "inauthentic black folklore" and treating "blacks as stereotypical

⁶⁰⁹ Brooks Atkinson, "The Play: Drama of the Race Riot in 'Stevedore,' Put on by Theatre Union," *New York Times*, April 19, 1934, 33.

⁶¹⁰ E. Quita Craig, *Black Drama of the Federal Theatre Era: Beyond the Formal Horizons* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 9.

⁶¹¹ George Sklar, interview by Harry Goldman, August 11, 1982, in Los Angeles, CA, Rare Books Room, Columbia University Oral History Collection.

⁶¹² Atkinson, "The Play: Drama of the Race Riot," 33.

⁶¹³ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 310.

⁶¹⁴ Jay Williams, *Stage Left* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1974), 115.

figures.”⁶¹⁵ (Loften Mitchell wrote about the negative reactions major black literary figures had about *The Green Pastures*, including Dick Campbell and Sterling Brown.)⁶¹⁶ To indicate the progressive nature of the entire endeavor, Paul Peters had originally entitled *Stevedore* as *Wharf Nigger*; Sklar was opposed to a title with the word *nigger* in it.⁶¹⁷ As Brooks Atkinson reminded his readers, the dramatists “have not forgotten that Negroes are human beings.”⁶¹⁸ Walter White, who was executive secretary of the NAACP from 1931 to 1935, attributed the success to an emphasis on story over propaganda:

Stevedore, a grim and, at times, melodramatic picture of race conflict in the deep South, produced by the proletarian Theatre Union, induced New Yorkers to travel far downtown to Eva Le Gallienne’s barn-like Civic Repertory Theatre to see a cast made up almost entirely of Negro actors give life to a play which in less skilful hands might have been a dreary piece of propaganda. The authors of *Stevedore* were far wiser than the writer of *They Shall Not Die*, based on the Scottsboro case, for those who wrote *Stevedore* were content more largely to let the story tell itself instead of making it too obviously propagandistic.⁶¹⁹

That notion of *Stevedore*’s depiction of credible black characters was also supported by another commentator, who extends the argument by calling attention to blacks and whites working together (a theme that is prominent in *And People All Around*):

Stevedore is far richer in characterization and background than *They Shall Not Die*.⁶²⁰ Various types of Negro, differentiated especially in respect to their attitude toward the lawless tyranny of the whites, are presented; and behind the action there is, as it were, a backdrop of Negro poetry, music, humor, song, and dance. Lonnie Thompson is an “uppity” Negro whose elimination is especially desired by the white employers. His struggle against fate, with the sentimental coloring of his love affair with Ruby

⁶¹⁵ Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, vol. 1, A-J (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Books, 2004), 443.

⁶¹⁶ Loften Mitchell, “History of the Negro in American Theatre (part XXI),” *Amsterdam News* August 14, 1965, 22.

⁶¹⁷ Williams, *Stage Left*, 114.

⁶¹⁸ Brooks Atkinson, “Rioting on the Waterfront,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1934, X1.

⁶¹⁹ Walter White, “The Negro on the American Stage,” *English Journal* 24, no. 3 (March 1935): 179-180.

⁶²⁰ John Wexley’s *They Shall Not Die* is a dramatized version of the Scottsboro boys’ case and trial. Loften Mitchell praised this drama, writing that, “This exciting, so-called propaganda play was one of many that demanded justice for the black man.” Loften Mitchell, “History of the Negro in American Theatre (part XXII),” *Amsterdam News*, August 21, 1965, 20.

Oxley, is the emotional focus of the play, but it is not overemphasized. The real protagonist is the Negro race; the real objective is its effort for life and happiness; the real thesis is the union of Negro and white workers in common revolt against exploitation.⁶²¹

Theatre of the Depression era reflected ideologically radical politics that encouraged transgression. But despite the political consciousness-raising, this and similar plays were often more symbolic gestures than effective tools for change. Robert Penn Warren's essay *The Briar Patch*, published in 1930, acknowledged the stark reality of race relations at the time. Although Warren defended racial segregation in the essay, a position he denounced and regretted for the remainder of his life, he was accurate about the harsh political realities when he avowed that nothing could have changed the contemporary situation of segregation, arguing, "The South wasn't ready for it, the North wasn't ready for it, the Negro wasn't."⁶²² Well-intentioned politics of the 1930s, unlike the racial politics of the 1960s, had little chance of actualizing changes. Thus, the politics of *Stevedore*, which was produced at a progressive theatre, was constrained within the frame of symbolic gestures.

Sklar, who believed in and sanctioned the use of drama as a weapon, was a product of the 1930s. In gesturing toward inclusiveness, the cultural politics of the 1930s were similar to the cultural politics of the 1960s; however, as stated, without the power to actualize efficacy. Both decades were noted for increased political participation, considerable commitment from artists, and heightened political adversity. It is particularly interesting to note that Sklar's theatre prominence is anchored in the 1930s, during which time he was a leading dramatist of social protest plays.

⁶²¹ Robert Morss Lovett, "The Drama of Mass Action," *English Journal* 24, no. 1 (January 1935): 5-6.

⁶²² Floyd C. Watkins, John T. Hiers, and Mary Louise Weeks, eds., *Talking with Robert Penn Warren* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1990), 33.

Depression politics shaped Sklar's cultural aesthetics, affirmed his political sympathies, and enriched his artistic sensibility; equally as significant, it imbued him with a sense of commitment. Central to the Depression era theatre was the idea of belonging, being a part of something--a notion embedded in the name of one of the most important theatres of that era, the Group Theatre. Historian Alfred Haworth Jones explained, "A sense of community, engendered by shared economic adversity, represented an aspect of the egalitarian spirit of the Thirties."⁶²³

One critic noted that the self-consciousness of the 1930s drama placed limitations on Sklar's play, arguing:

And People All Around is written in an old-fashion protest-play form that seems utterly void of impact in the 1960s. Moments bear a striking resemblance to *Waiting for Lefty*. The play as a whole comes more definitely from a genre that pervaded the Odets era.⁶²⁴

Despite the critic's objection, *And People All Around* and the voting issue it presented were apt for the political commitment of the 1960s. Michael Denning notes, "Commitment was the rubric used to sum up the political aspects of the career of writers and artists."⁶²⁵ It is evident that Sklar's commitment in the 1930s tied him to that decade. Therefore, his connection to theatre in the 1960s is in part a reconnection to the earlier period. Those characteristics of the 1930s that captured, activated, and energized his imagination were rejuvenated. Sklar's son confirmed as much:

Not that he wasn't political during the 1940s and the 1950s, but everything was on hold because of the political climate at the time. I think when this happened [the murders of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner], it struck the conscience of the whole nation and he was part of that. It said that the Civil Rights Movement was a serious thing and it had happened and there was going to be a battle. It said to him that it was time to get out there again—on the front line, where he had not been for a long time. I think it made

⁶²³ Alfred Haworth Jones, "The Search for a Usable American Past in the New Deal Era," *American Quarterly* 23, no. 5 (December 1971): 719.

⁶²⁴ James M Lardner, "And People All Around--at Tufts Arena through Saturday," *Harvard Crimson*, no. 6, July 22, 1966, p. 2.

⁶²⁵ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 56.

him feel that he had to do it. That was who he really was. It was the years between that were atypical for him. And this reawakened in him who he really was and that was why he was a political playwright and this was bringing him back to that. It was not just the three young men; it was also the whole idea that the Civil Rights Movement was a serious political movement. There was a part of his soul that had been in abeyance, but it was reawakened.⁶²⁶

George Sklar explained his withdrawal from theatre as well as the historical event that engaged his conscience, catapulting him back to a profession he had foresworn:

I swore then that I was through with the theatre--and I meant it. For eighteen years I cloistered myself in the cubicle that is my work room and wrote novels. Then came "the hot summer of '64," the episode of the three civil rights workers in Mississippi. The search for those missing boys became my search. It engaged my conscience as it did that of decent people all over the world. And when the three crushed bodies were bulldozed out of interment under that earthen dam, I knew it was something I had to write about. The events of Selma clinched it for me. I started to plan it as a novel. It insisted in falling into dramatized scenes. I couldn't kid myself any longer. It was a play--and should be. It demanded the immediacy, the direct impact on an audience. Resolve or not resolve.⁶²⁷

Sklar is specific about *why* and *when* he left the theatre, revealing historical and biographical details that are anti-Hollywood while simultaneously connecting him to a dramatist's sensibility:

I hadn't written a play in eighteen years and had no intention of writing one. After five productions in social theater of the Thirties--*Merry Go Round*, *Peace on Earth*, *Stevedore*, *Parade*, *Life and Death of an American*--I wrote three plays which went unproduced. Broadway wasn't interested in plays of social content. The Group Theatre, and the Theatre Union and the Federal Theatre Project had folded. To depend on the social conscience of individual producers was quixotic. I called it quits and took a job in Hollywood, where I served four years in the studio cell block.

Vera Caspary had just written her novel of psychological suspense, *Laura*, and asked me to collaborate on a play version. By then I

⁶²⁶ Zachary Sklar, interview with author (April 6, 2007).

⁶²⁷ George Sklar, "Author Returns to Theatre," *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, December 4, 1966, G2.

was stir-crazy and wanted out. The writing of the play was fun, the production a nightmare--a traumatic series of encounters with the hysterical moods and demands of a middle-aged movie actress who had in a misbegotten moment committed herself to play an ingénue role--her insecurity, complemented by the panic of a neophyte producer, resulted in incessant demands for rewriting which kept us up till five every morning in bleak hotel rooms in Wilmington and Philadelphia. It was wrong rewriting for the wrong reasons. Those people were playing games. We didn't want to play.⁶²⁸

It is essential to note that Sklar not only accentuated the importance of the art and the artist's connection to a political cause, he identifies the theatre as the preferred art form to communicate with an audience.

When considering the transformative nature of both tumultuous decades, the 1930s and 1960s, the similarities become apparent. It is easier to comprehend how Sklar was re-energized by the politics of the 1960s. Alan Brinkley connects the two decades, revealing that artists are likely to be active during a politicalized era:

There is a long tradition among artists that one of the duties of an artist is to give witness to injustice, a tradition that stretches back over many centuries. It was a particularly visible type of art in the 1930s—popular front art, social art, controversial, but nevertheless very powerful. In the 1950s, you could begin to see the artists, both black and white artists, linking themselves to various causes, to the Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War, McCarthyism, environmentalism, elimination of poverty. This penetrated huge areas of the arts and literature. The art and literature of the 1960s was politicized in the same way as was art and literature in the 1930s. Beginning in the 1970s, although political art certainly didn't disappear until at least after the end of the Vietnam War, there was a long period in which mainstream art became less political, and it probably still is to some degree. But political is again becoming a more important part of art. It's a characteristic of our time. Art reflects its time. When the times are highly politicalized, and there are great controversies, artists join those controversies; when times are less turbulent, artists are less likely to be activists.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Alan Brinkley, interview with author (December 11, 2006).

While it was Sklar's sympathy for a socialist aesthetic of the 1930s that inspired his ideological attachment to sociopolitical causes, it was his dramatic priorities of the 1930s that influenced and established his commitment to the cultural politics of the 1960s. His insistence on playing a political/cultural role in the Civil Rights Movement is evident in his drama *And People All Around*, which dramatized the struggle of blacks to gain the vote.

And People All Around

And People All Around oscillated between two stories. First, it offers an account of the political happenings of Freedom Summer, portraying the activist politics of massive numbers of white students volunteering for the critical social movement. Second, it dramatizes a love story while simultaneously revealing how the protagonist (Don Tindall) was pulled into the evolving civil rights politics—a politics that required him to wrestle with his conscience. [This concept of conscience is critical and will be discussed more extensively later.]

To make his political point, Sklar did not limit himself to his protagonist's struggle with his conscience; he wanted his drama to be pertinent. Speaking of his audience, Sklar reasoned, "I want to really and truly disturb them. I want them to go out of the theatre with complacency shed."⁶³⁰ Sklar was not the only author who aroused the conscience of America by offering an account of the three murdered civil rights workers (Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner). In *Three Lives for Mississippi* (1965), his harrowing narrative of the murders, journalist and author William Bradford Huie angered many, particularly Mississippians. While talking about the three murders during his last interview in 1985, Huie stressed, "I wrote and I upset them, and I'm proud of it because they needed it."⁶³¹ Mississippi at that time,

was the heart and soul of segregation. It had resisted integration more fiercely than any of the other southern states. That resistance

⁶³⁰ Ray Boume, "The Call Board," *Bay State Banner* (Boston), July 16, 1966, 6.

⁶³¹ "William Bradford Huie—Crusading Southern Writer," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 24, 1986, 19.

included state legislation of anti-integration laws and statutes that effectively made it impossible for federal agents to monitor or enforce integration efforts. In addition, Mississippi countered integration with extreme violence, perpetrated by police and citizens alike. By 1963, Mississippi was a virtual police state where segregation reigned supreme.⁶³²

Thus, registering blacks to vote in Mississippi was a radical act. The state “permitted fewer blacks to vote for Lyndon Baines Johnson in 1964 than had been eligible to vote for William McKinley in 1896.”⁶³³ Huie wanted to expose Mississippi’s depravity to the nation and force the state to join mainstream America.

Huie’s work undoubtedly contributed to Sklar’s vision. Zachary Sklar (Sklar’s son) confirmed that Huie’s books were around while his father was doing research for *And People All Around*.⁶³⁴ Huie’s account describes an anonymous individual who had seen the actual crime and privately related the details to law officials. Sklar centered his drama on an eyewitness, the character of Tindall, who bore a similarity to the character who revealed the information to Huie. Tindall was a white Southerner who is sympathetic to the progressive politics of blacks. Shortly after Tindall, an architect in the fictional Southern town of Leucadia, ends his engagement to his prejudice-ridden Southern belle, he receives an invitation from a black childhood friend:

DON

In the mail that day there was an invitation to a party honoring the students who’d come down to work for civil rights. I didn’t plan to go. I wasn’t sure that I approved of their coming down, and I knew I didn’t want to get involved. But it came from Lloyd Lewis, a Negro I’d played with as a kid—and it bothered me. Lloyd and I were best friends until long after we knew colored and white couldn’t be best friends.

(*And People All Around*, 13)

⁶³² R. Edward Nordhaus, “S.N.C.C. and the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi, 1963-64: A Time of Change,” *History Teacher* 17, no. 1 (November 1983): 96.

⁶³³ Neil R. McMillen, “Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Enforcement and Black Protest in the 1960s,” *Journal of Southern History* 43, no. 3 (August 1977): 352.

⁶³⁴ Zachary Sklar, interview.

After wrestling with his conscience, Tindall ignores a white friend's advice to just send money and not attend the party. His loyalty to his childhood friend obliges him to go. The narrative development complicates his predicament when Tindall establishes a relationship with Jean Portugal, one of the Northern white workers in town to assist with voter registration of blacks. He goes deeper into the fermenting civil rights battle as he falls in love with Jean. Tindall's entanglement with the culture and politics of the Civil Rights Movement becomes more grounded when he is forced to recognize the ruthlessness of the racist sheriff and the Redeemers, a white supremacist group modeled after the Ku Klux Klan. Those representatives of widespread Southern sentiments agreed that the civil rights "agitators" were not wanted in town.

Sklar used authentic tactics to show how their foes let the civil rights workers know they were not welcome in Leucadia. Initially, Tindall himself was not subject to the violence and intimidation the civil rights workers received, but his association with Jean made it possible for him to experience the effects of bricks being hurled through windows, threatening telephone calls, and unrestricted harassment. As a spectator, Tindall is able to observe those tactics from afar until he witnesses the ruthless murders of three civil rights workers:

DON

I watched, and I too felt a wild impulse to run out and join them. But I didn't. I sat safe in my hiding place and watched them finish the job. One of them, as if to prove his manhood, pumped five shots from a Colt automatic into Lloyd's mangled body, and a couple more ran up to empty their guns. Then all was quiet. A moment ago they were gods, exalting in the power of life and death. Now they were mortals, uneasy. Whatever their thoughts, I had seen their acts. And as they turned to their cars, removing robes and hoods, I could see who they were. And I didn't want to see, didn't want to know! Still, when they loaded the bodies in a truck and started down the hill, I got into my car and followed. I had to.

(*And People All Around*, 48)⁶³⁵

⁶³⁵ George Sklar, *And People All Around* (New York: Random House, 1966), 91. [All quotes from the play are from this edition.]

The dramatic narrative then intensifies, forcing Tindall to deal with a critical dilemma: should he reveal what he observed or keep quiet? Tindall decides to telephone a Department of Justice official and anonymously reports what he had seen; this was a moral act that is central to the conflict in the drama. (His anonymous call was not as anonymous as he thought; unbeknownst to him, the phone was tapped.)

The debate over theatre's role as a moral institution has been going on for centuries. In 1933, critic George Jean Nathan stated that there are no morals in art.⁶³⁶ On the other hand British scholar Ronald Peacock argued that "you cannot move a step in drama without being involved in morals of some sort."⁶³⁷ Friedrich Schiller's essay *The Stage Considered as a Moral Institution*⁶³⁸ placed on drama the responsibility of parenting the moral growth of a society:

I cannot possibly overlook the great influence that a good permanent theater would exercise on the spirit of a nation. By national spirit I mean opinions and tendencies which are common to the people of one nation and differ from those of other nationalities. Only the stage can produce this accord to so great a degree because it takes all human knowledge as its province, exhausts all situations of life, and sheds light into every corner of the human heart; because it unites all sorts and conditions of people and commands the most popular road to the heart and understanding.⁶³⁹

Clearly, Sklar believed in the moral responsibility of theatre.

By having Tindall contact the Department of Justice, Sklar suggests that the moral act of one person can make a difference; he also understood that for it to be effective theatre, the ideology had to be presented in human terms.

⁶³⁶ Charles Angoff, ed., *The World of George Jean Nathan* (New York: Knopf, 1952), 6.

⁶³⁷ Ronald Peacock, "Drama and the Moral Connection," *Modern Language Review* 78, no. 4 (October 1983): 23.

⁶³⁸ The essay was read at a public session of the Elector's German Society in Mannheim in the year 1784.

⁶³⁹ Friedrich Schiller, "The Stage Considered as a Moral Institution," in *Essays on German Theater*, ed. Margaret Herzfeld-Sander, trans. Jane Bannard Greene (New York: Continuum, 1985), 31.

I'd like people who see it to express their opinions, act, do something about the Civil Rights Movement. But my play's not a preachment. It's a human story and must be effective in human terms. After all, I tried to write a play of substance about what happens to living people involved in the truths of today.⁶⁴⁰

And People All Around, steeped in transgression, is dominated by the politics of activism.

Soon after the location of the bodies has been revealed, Tindall is ostracized; his house is burned to the ground; and he is arrested and falsely charged with homosexuality. After repeatedly refusing to retract his statement, he is brutally beaten to death—thereby becoming the tragic hero. His death demonstrates that whites who assist the cause of black civil righters are at the same risk as blacks. That was clearly the message with the deaths of Goodman and Schwerner. But Tindall has not died in vain. In the play, a memorial park is built in the town of Leucadia to honor the fictional civil rights workers. Sklar has linked the deaths of the fictional characters to the actual deaths of three civil rights activists in 1964. Like many activists, scholars, and historians, as well as family members of the three slain young men,⁶⁴¹ Huie affirmed that their deaths had meaning:

I believe that most men of goodwill will agree that James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner did not die in vain. Their deaths served the cause of freedom for all people, white and Negro, in Mississippi, in the United States, and, hopefully, throughout the world.⁶⁴²

Again, a point worthy of repeating, Sklar's drama suggests that when people act, they can effect change. In the play, Tindall's act was a visible form of activism, allowing his audience to live vicariously through the moral dilemma that tugged at Tindall's conscience. This is a point that Daniel Sklar asserted:

⁶⁴⁰ Samuel Hirsch, "Hirsch on Theater," *Boston Herald*, July 14, 1966, 18.

⁶⁴¹ Philip Benjamin, "Families Hope 3 Didn't Die in Vain," *New York Times*, June 20, 1965, 60.

⁶⁴² William Bradford Huie, *Three Lives for Mississippi* (New York: WWC Books, 1965), 240.

I think that the protagonist in the play is having a crisis of conscience. Many whites had stood on the side and just ignored it. Then, the black students in the South were taking all the risk. What was interesting about *And People All Around* is that the character of the architect is now going to get involved and not let this continue. I think that touched a lot of people who saw the play who would have otherwise walked the other way or ignored it.⁶⁴³

Beyond tugging at the conscience of America, Sklar's drama highlighted significant themes of the Civil Rights Movement. It had an integrationist tenor, prophesying that the days of the old racial regime were fading out. It emphasized a need to revolt against individual complacency--to get involved was the clear political message. The drama also suggested that terror would no longer prevent the ordinary citizen from fundamentally doing what was morally right. Using voting as the premise, the drama disclosed to the audience that the absorption of civil rights ideologies into mainstream American politics was inevitable. Finally, Sklar believed that theatre must be immediate, immersed in the thought and tenor of the times while contributing to the contemporary discourse. By building on historical events, creating fictional characters, and exploring a relevant situation, Sklar was able to engage the audience on an emotional level while simultaneously arousing their intellectual awareness. His indictment of racism and his presentation of the moral courage of the voting rights activists provided his audience an opportunity to experience the current political state of affairs. Equally as important, the drama re-ignited Sklar's political sensibility.

In conjunction with this sensibility that fostered moral acts, moral growth, moral courage, and the moral responsibility of Sklar's characters, the all-inclusive context of moral invaded every aspect of the black/white relations. One critic noted in 1964 that "The white man has an urgent moral obligation."⁶⁴⁴ The honoring of this moral obligation, which entailed doing right by

⁶⁴³ Daniel Sklar, interview with author (April 6, 2007).

⁶⁴⁴ Howard Taubman, "Common Burden," *New York Times*, May 3, 1964, X1.

blacks, was apparent in the theatre. It was not simply that productions of black dramatists increased as never before, the opportunities for black actors also multiplied. For example, there were four blacks in major supporting roles on Broadway during the 1959-60 season; in 1960-61, eight; in 1961-62, ten, and in 1962-63, twelve.⁶⁴⁵ This turn of events supports not only a growing acceptance of blacks by whites in mainstream American theatre, it validates that there was emerging a progressive and systematic change in attitude of whites towards blacks. Thus, the traditional accepted roles of blacks became outdated. The emerging progressive view allowed for blacks to gain the right to vote.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Vote

To fully grasp the dramatic strength of Sklar's *And People All Around*, it is helpful to be aware of blacks' struggle to gain equality at the ballot box. In sharp contrast to the nonviolent tactics employed by many black activists, intimidation and threats of violence were used to prevent blacks from voting. Mississippi's resistance to blacks' voting was well known.⁶⁴⁶ In May 1955, Rev. George W. Lee was fatally shot for refusing to remove his name from the voter registration list.⁶⁴⁷ In August, Lamar Smith, who was 63 years old, was killed in broad daylight, with witnesses, for trying to get out the black vote in an upcoming primary election.⁶⁴⁸ In November of the same year, Gus Courts was shot for advocating that blacks should vote. Between 1961 and 1964, the voting rights battles became even more intense. Blacks became politically more assertive during this period, honoring what James Baldwin referred to as a "new day," a genuine feeling in the black community that blacks would no longer wait for their rights.⁶⁴⁹ The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which banned the use of a literacy test

⁶⁴⁵ "Integrated Casts," *Chicago Daily Defender*, September 5, 1963, 13.

⁶⁴⁶ "Publishers Ask Attorney General to Curb Violence in Mississippi," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 30, 1955, 1.

⁶⁴⁷ Louis Lautier, "FBI Probing into Death of Mississippi Leader," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 21, 1955, 1.

⁶⁴⁸ "U. S. Urged to Halt 'Fury' in Mississippi," *New York Times*, September 8, 1955, 10.

⁶⁴⁹ James Baldwin, "A Negro Assays the Negro Mood," *New York Times Magazine*, March 12, 1962, 25.

as a prerequisite for registration, was a major victory against the entrenched systemic and institutional barriers that kept blacks from voting.

The history of the black voting rights revolution, especially the year 1964, overflows with dramatic events that capture the harrowing nuances of the struggle. During the 1964 summer, “one hundred civil rights organizers were arrested and eighty seriously beaten, thirty-nine black churches and thirty black schools were fire-bombed, and five civil rights activists were killed.”⁶⁵⁰ In the organized reign of terror against blacks in Mississippi alone, crosses were burned in sixty-four of Mississippi’s eighty-two counties on a single night in April 1964.⁶⁵¹ Not surprisingly, such pervasive brutality attracted widespread media coverage. Some politicians, such as Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, tried to attribute the violence to the media itself:

There seems to be little hesitation in exposing to a vast public (those) splinter, frivolous, and irresponsible individuals who, in many instances, represent groups so small in number as to be practically non-representative. And what is even more deplorable has been the publicity given to the haters, the kooks, and the psychotics.⁶⁵²

While the media may have given publicity to fringe elements, it brought attention to civil rights incidents as never before. Wayne A. Santoro argues that segregationist violence did assist the Civil Rights Movement win Southern suffrage when the audience became attentive and sympathetic.⁶⁵³ The attentiveness and sympathetic concern came about because of strong mass media coverage of racial incidents and events. Of all the horrific events and incidents of violence during 1964 (Freedom Summer), what placed the spotlight on the civil rights’ ballot initiative were the deaths of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner, young civil rights workers who were

⁶⁵⁰ Manning Marable, *Living History: How Reimagining the African-American Past Can Remake America’s Racial Future* (New York: Civitas, 2006), 30.

⁶⁵¹ Claude Sitton, “Mississippi Is Gripped by Fear of Violence in Civil Rights Drive,” *New York Times*, May 30, 1964, 1.

⁶⁵² “Daley Blames News Media for Violence,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 29, 1966, 1.

⁶⁵³ Wayne A. Santoro, “The Civil Rights Movement and the Right to Vote: Black Protest, Segregationist Violence and the Audience,” *Social Forces* 86, no. 4 (June 2008): 1391-1414.

murdered while working to register black voters near Philadelphia (in Neshoba County), Mississippi. Their deaths, which received unprecedented media coverage, not only re-ignited Sklar's civil rights passion but also stirred the conscience of America while galvanizing the Civil Rights Movement. Harry Belafonte captured the essence of what those deaths meant to the plight of the Movement:

It showed to America that its struggle was truly integrated. It proved to black people that the issue wasn't exclusively black. And that we had great comrades and allies who came from other nations and other inclinations who were very much committed to the black hope for a democratic America. And I think the murder of those two boys and that black kid set wheels in motion that turned it all around. We got the Civil Rights Act passed. We got all of these things, and enforced--the murder of Dr. King did that as well. America became a very different place, and I think from a racial perspective it validated what young white people did in coming to the Mississippi summer to help black people register to vote--it was huge. And then right after that the National Guard murdered those students at Kent State. Shot down on the campuses by the university, it became part of that very militant period. The murder of those kids did a lot to awaken America.⁶⁵⁴

In *And People All Around*, one of Sklar's characters says, "The discovery of those three bodies has had more impact than all the lynchings since the Civil War."⁶⁵⁵ As tragic as the murders were, they reinforced the focus on securing the vote for blacks. After the murders, black voter registration rates increased; even FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover stated, "Negro leaders should concentrate on getting their people registered to vote."⁶⁵⁶

While exposing the horrors of the situation in Mississippi, Sklar emphasized the fictionality of the play:

Although there are episodes in this play, which may suggest actual happenings of the summer of '64, they are not meant to portray those happenings or the people who were involved in them. The

⁶⁵⁴ Harry Belafonte, interview with author (August 5, 2010).

⁶⁵⁵ Sklar, *And People All Around*, 91.

⁶⁵⁶ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 535.

characters, the plot, the actions are fictional, and no resemblance to persons, living or dead, is intended. The town of Leucadia does not, in fact, exist. It is, rather, an imagined composite of many towns.⁶⁵⁷

The disclaimer serves for legal purposes only; everything about *And People All Around* conforms to the events surrounding the deaths of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. The similarity was so close that Sklar was uneasy about meeting Andrew Goodman's mother, Carolyn. In referring to Carolyn Goodman, Sklar's son (Zachary) stated:

She lived in New York. Pop didn't know her. And Andrew Goodman's father wasn't living at that time. Carolyn Goodman was quite visible and quite outspoken. I think he was a little bit nervous as to how she would take the play because it is not a documentary account of what happened.⁶⁵⁸

Sklar's son goes on to say that Carolyn Goodman did like the play.⁶⁵⁹

Politicking the Drama and Reawakening the Conscience of America

Of all the plays discussed in this dissertation,⁶⁶⁰ *And People All Around* is most focused on conscience, particularly the conscience of whites. In the 1930s, James Weldon Johnson, who earned many titles,⁶⁶¹ took up the case of the black conscience when he wrote that he "felt convinced that it would be necessary to awaken black America, awaken it to a sense of its rights and to a determination to hold fast to such as it possessed and to seek in every orderly way possible to secure all others to which it was entitled."⁶⁶² While Johnson put forth a challenge to blacks in the 1930s, Sklar raised the issue of conscience for whites in the 1960s.

Within the context of America's conscience in the 1960s, the focus was primarily on the group with the power, whites. The appeals to the conscience of America came in abundance

⁶⁵⁷ Front of the play, Sklar, *And People All Around*.

⁶⁵⁸ Zachary Sklar, interview.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ *A Land Beyond the River*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Purlie Victorious*, and *Dutchman*.

⁶⁶¹ Author, diplomat, politician, poet, journalist, educator, anthologist, lawyer, and a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance; he also wrote the Negro national anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*.

⁶⁶² James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson* (New York: Viking, 1961), 314-315.

from politicians, religious leaders, and artists, suggesting that the Civil Rights Movement's challenge was to transform American society through the awakening of a political consciousness in white America. Harry W. Jones, the Cardozo Professor of Jurisprudence at Columbia University, noted, "More was done for racial justice in the five years after 1961 than in the ninety-six years that followed the Civil War."⁶⁶³ In June 1963, in a nationwide television address, President John F. Kennedy framed the civil rights of blacks as a moral issue, urging every American to examine his conscience.⁶⁶⁴ Speaking of the three slain men, Marvin Rich, who was the community relations director of CORE, stated poignantly that the "sacrifices and the determination to go on in spite of them have struck a responsive chord throughout the nation."⁶⁶⁵ Robert Goodman (Andrew's father), speaking of the death of his son, stated: "The tragedy is not private. It is part of the public conscience of our country."⁶⁶⁶

In stark contrast, Amiri Baraka saw conscience in a negative light. He argued at the time that Schwerner and Goodman were in Mississippi solely to clear their consciences.⁶⁶⁷ Years later, Baraka concluded that his original response was wrong.⁶⁶⁸ Playwright Arthur Miller, whose plays often revolved around the moral obligations of individuals, framed the issue of conscience in the context of guilt. Writing about the three victims in the *New York Times*, Miller made readers aware of how evil triumphs when the conscience is dormant:

If they could speak, could the three boys who were murdered in Mississippi really explain why they had to go to the end? More—

⁶⁶³ Harry W. Jones, "Civil Disobedience," *Proceedings of the American Philosophy Society* 3, no. 4 (August 24, 1967): 196.

⁶⁶⁴ Robert Young, "President Asks for New Laws on Rights," *Chicago Tribune*, June 12, 1963, 1.

⁶⁶⁵ Marvin Rich, "The Congress of Racial Equality and Its Strategy," in "The Negro Protest," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 357 (January 1965): 116.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 408.

⁶⁶⁷ Harry Gilroy, "Racial Debate Displaces Jazz Program," *New York Times*, February 10, 1964, 47. [After Schwerner and Goodman were murdered in Mississippi, Baraka angered many when he refused to honor the two slain whites. He derided their sacrifice and victim-status when he referred to them as "artifacts" and "paintings on the wall."]

⁶⁶⁸ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1997), 285. [To make sure his meaning was clear, Baraka added, "Those white boys were only seeking to assuage their own leaking consciences." Later regretting the crude and insensitive remarks, Baraka offered, "I was confusing Schwerner and Goodman with the young white poseur-liberals who sashayed safely through the streets of Greenwich Village, the behind-the-lines bleeding hearts. When, on the real side, if I could have stood some hard truth, Schwerner and Goodman were out there on the front lines doing more than I was!"]

if each of them could discover for us in his personal history his motives and the last and most obscure corner of his psychology, would we really be any closer to the mystery of why we first require human sacrifices before our guilt can be transformed into responsibility? Is it not an absurdity that the deaths of three young men should make any difference when hundreds have been lynched and beaten to death before them, and tens of thousands humiliated?

The difference, I think, is that these, including Chaney, the young Negro, were not inevitable victims of Mississippi but volunteers. They had transformed guilt into responsibility, and in so doing opened the way to a vision that leaped the pit of remorse and helplessness. And it is no accident that the people of Mississippi at first refused to concede they had been murdered, for they have done everything in their power to deny responsibility for the “character” of the Negro they paternalistically “protect,” and here in these three young bodies was the return with interest for their investment in the guilt that does not act.⁶⁶⁹

Ossie Davis, a contemporary of Miller’s, connects the conscience directly to theatre, stressing

“Theatre could revolutionize the conscience of my country.”⁶⁷⁰

The conscience of white America was very much part of the Movement; it was also a key element in the drama. Don wrestles with his conscience before he decides to come forward:

DON

I stayed up all night with the others as they waited for some word, some clue. I was tempted to come out with it. But I couldn’t tell Betty. I didn’t have the heart. Couldn’t even tell Jean. Not only out of concern for them. I was concerned about a hundred things. All the repercussions that might follow and which I wasn’t prepared to face. The more I thought about it, the more frightening was my realization that I was the only non-Redeemer who knew, the only witness, should it come to that, who could tell.

(And People All Around, 59)

Don was not the only character wrestling consistently with conscience-anxiety throughout the play; the character Jean Portugal also admits that her conscience forced her to become more active:

⁶⁶⁹ Arthur Miller, “Our Guilt for the World’s Evil,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1965, SM10.

⁶⁷⁰ “Ossie Davis Gives View on Theatre,” *New York Times*, February 1, 1965, 16.

Jean

One day a friend of mine called to say she was coming down here, and suddenly it all seemed kind of trivial. I began to ask myself whether dancing was anything but a narcissistic indulgence.

DON

We've all got our egos. Don't you think I get a bang when I hear someone admire a building I designed?

JEAN

It's not the same. You created something outside of yourself. You're not a body on display on a stage.

DON

My buildings aren't just steel and concrete. They're my mind on display. Art is art, and if it's good, not only is it not narcissistic, it's a boon to the public.

JEAN

Maybe I didn't think I was a boon. Anyway, my conscience bothered me enough to--.

(And People All Around, 23)

To achieve his goals, Sklar encourages the audience to identify with Tindall and Portugal, making them exemplary protagonists. If this identification is successful, it produces a transformation in the spectator's political consciousness. In essence, Tindall and Portugal represent the dramatic Everyman and Everywoman, characters idealized as models of moral integrity. The message was clear: by their confronting social evil, the foundations of a democratic society are upheld; social equality is the result. Of course for the model to work, Sklar needed to show the defeat of the opposing force. He does this through the character of the sheriff, who admits defeat:

SHERIFF

There comes a time when you've got to realize you're licked. We were licked a hundred years ago—they thought! But we didn't act it. We called the tune and everyone danced to it. Well, I'm beginning to think it's caught up with us. I'm not so sure we didn't make a mistake with those boys.

(And People All Around, 108)

The sheriff never acknowledges any wrongdoing, nor does he renounce his racism; however, he understands that his world is changing. This is an emerging politics that was antithetical to the

racial regime of white supremacy. The sheriff understood that his racist views would no longer prevail. In the real world this was the beginning of the so-called *New South*. That became apparent when even staunch white supremacists such as George Wallace⁶⁷¹ realized the *Old South* was dying while giving birth to a *New South*. In reality, elements of the Old South reacted to the play; it stirred up the Ku Klux Klan. For the purpose of the play, Sklar invents a fictional group called the Redeemers as a stand in for White Citizens Councils, the National States' Rights Party, the Ku Klux Klan, and other white supremacist groups. Productions of the play faced many difficulties from racist groups. For example, On October 20, 1966, the opening night of a production at Towson State College in Maryland:

...approximately twenty-five members of the Ku Klux Klan picketed on the road before the college. A crowd of students assembled on the college green and exchanged jeers with the picketers. When the play began the crowd dispersed, and about eight Klan members went in to see the play. They coughed loudly through the performance and made remarks among themselves. There was an outburst of applause during the scene where the civil rights workers were arrested. The Klan members left noisily shortly before the close of the first act. The publicity from this incident resulted in capacity houses all three nights of the play's run.⁶⁷²

The real sheriff, Lawrence Rainey, strongly implicated in the actual murders, was charged but acquitted. He ultimately played a role in bringing the case to justice. Nicholas Katzenbach, who was attorney general at the time, stated that J. Edgar Hoover would not tolerate law enforcement officials' involvement with such an act:

The murders of the three civil rights workers had been something that we had worried about, and worried about, and worried about—that something like this would happen. It was actually important that Johnson was president then—he was furious about it. I think that probably helped as far as Hoover was concerned. I rarely

⁶⁷¹ Bruce Winters, "Even Wallace Knows a 'New South' Is Here," *Sun*, November 10, 1971, 5.

⁶⁷² Professor Gillespie [director of drama at Towson State College] to American Playwrights Theatre, printed in APT Progress Report, November 18, 1966. Appendix 37, 325-327.

give credit to Hoover. The murder of the civil rights workers was more than he was going to tolerate. He was willing to tolerate all kinds of segregation, and even some beatings and so forth, but he was not willing to tolerate murder, and particularly murder by law enforcement officials, which is what that case was. He put an inspector by the name of Sullivan in charge of that. They went down, and they spread money around there like it was Monopoly money.⁶⁷³

Although the murders of the three civil rights workers was the event around which the action of the play revolved, the play was really about the average person and his/her sense of and robust commitment to reasoning and progressive action.

Community as Chorus

Sklar made an unusual dramaturgical move in representing the inhabitants of Leucadia as a chorus. The chorus, of course, was at the heart of ancient Greek theatre. Aristotle said that the “Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action.”⁶⁷⁴ Sklar’s use of the chorus in *And People All Around* was Athenian in spirit. Sklar introduces his chorus before the dialogue begins:

Angled spots come up on the *Chorus of Commentators*. It is comprised of men and women, Negro and white, who stand facing the audience in a tight, triangular formation.

(*And People All Around*, 4)

In this chorus, a model of integration, blacks were not limited to stereotypical roles. This chorus not only provided the facts for the audience; it established a relationship with the audience while simultaneously allowing the audience to share in the action of current events. In essence, as an integral part of the action, the chorus became a protagonist in its own right.

⁶⁷³ Nicholas Katzenbach, interview with author (March 8, 2006). In Branch’s *Pillar of Fire*, Joseph Sullivan was discussed as “one of the greatest FBI inspectors,” 237.

⁶⁷⁴ S. H. Butcher, trans., *Aristotle’s Poetics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 92.

One critic in reviewing the play observed that “the chorus is both the narrator of the action and the conscience of the audience.”⁶⁷⁵ Sklar employed the chorus as commentator, providing history, setting the background, rendering the mood of the townspeople, and commenting on the momentum-gaining civil rights politics. At the end of the drama, the chorus summarizes the progress gained after the ordeal:

(Lights come up on the chorus)

FIRST MAN

Three years have gone by.

SECOND MAN

A civil rights and voting law have been enacted.

THIRD MAN

And many, who couldn’t before, have now registered.

FIRST WOMAN

Surprisingly, the world hasn’t come to an end.

SECOND WOMAN

Nor has it really changed.

FIRST MAN

True, signs reading “Colored” and “White” have been removed.

THIRD WOMAN

Twenty-three Negro girls and boys now attend white schools so that Leucadia qualifies for Federal funds.

SECOND MAN

And the Green Lantern Restaurant will even find a table for an occasional Negro customer.

FIRST MAN

But the Redeemers still meet in the hills.

SECOND MAN

A black man walking down the highway may still be ambushed and peppered with shot.

THIRD MAN

And a white sports car can suddenly plough into a crowd of Negro marchers at forty miles an hour, then swerve away, with a white girl’s voice screaming—

FIRST WOMAN

You black nigger bastards, I wouldn’t dirty my car on you!

SECOND WOMAN

No, the millennium hasn’t come.

FIRST MAN

Still, in a state flying a Confederate flag...

⁶⁷⁵ David G. Brown, “University Play Portrays Civil Rights Fights, Deaths,” *Ohio State Lantern*, November 14, 1966.

SECOND WOMAN

A black sheriff was elected.

THIRD MAN

Twenty Negroes, for the first time this century, sit in Southern Legislatures.

FIRST MAN

And a white sheriff who wore a button proclaiming "Never!"

SECOND MAN

Removed it to court the black vote.

SECOND WOMAN

And lost.

FIRST MAN

It isn't "Now."

SECOND MAN

(*Quietly*) But neither is it "Never!" (*Lights dim out on the chorus.*)

(*And People All Around*, 115 & 116)

Choruses have rarely been successfully employed in modern drama but critics suggested that Sklar was at least modestly successful. Richard Coe of the *Washington Post* wrote:

To accommodate a swift flow of many scenes, Sklar introduces the townsfolk in the form of Greek chorus. This patent device tends to pretentiousness at the start but gradually, under F. Cowles Strickland's aware direction, one accepts its purpose, for Sklar's subject matter is absorbing.⁶⁷⁶

The chorus provided an efficient tool to convey relevant information. For instance, the audience discovers that Leucadia was a "God-fearing town, with eighteen churches."⁶⁷⁷ Through the chorus, the audience learned when the burned car was found⁶⁷⁸ and when Tindall was beaten to death.⁶⁷⁹

FIRST MAN

For three hours exactly...

SECOND MAN

With measured intervals out for reflection...

THIRD MAN

The process of persuasion continued.

⁶⁷⁶ Richard L. Coe, "Provocative Drama at AU (American University)," *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, December 10, 1966, C5.

⁶⁷⁷ Sklar, *And People All Around*, 91.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

FIRST WOMAN

Thirty seconds later, it was over.

SECOND WOMAN

He had passed out twice before, and each time had been revived.

THIRD WOMAN

Not this time.

FIRST WOMAN

Not water.

SECOND WOMAN

Or mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

FIRST MAN

Not a pulmotor.

SECOND MAN

Or an incision and hand massage.

THIRD MAN

Could bring the beat back to his heart.

(*And People All Around*, 111 & 112)

The chorus allowed Sklar to bypass elaborate expository dialogue that might slow the action.

For example, the chorus succinctly informed the audience:

At eight-forty, Jeff Lawton of Boston, June graduate of Harvard
Law and volunteer counsel for CORE, arrived at the county jail.

(*And People All Around*, 41).

Sklar also expediently and efficiently packed information into the briefest dialogic passages:

FIRST WOMAN

(With quickening tempo) Leucadia is an expanding city.

SECOND WOMAN

With a fast-growing population.

FIRST MAN

It boasts of--

THIRD WOMAN

Its schools and playgrounds.

FIRST WOMAN

A balanced budget and low crime rate.

THIRD MAN

It offers an open shop and ample labor--

FIRST MAN

To supply its new textile and plane plants.

SECOND MAN

Its sour-mash distillery and lumber mill.

FIRST WOMAN

An open town.

(*And People All Around*, 5 & 6)

Sklar had every confidence that the audience knew the underlying history, and he did not labor over the unnecessary exposition. He did not bother, for example, to delineate the difference between CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) and COFO (Council of Federated Organizations).⁶⁸⁰ Historical revelations in the drama were easily plucked from newspaper headlines. These ranged from information about outsiders coming to a small town to stir up trouble to churches being bombed to civil rights workers missing being a hoax. Sklar did not have to transform his drama into something immediate; the actual historical background provided the immediacy, and the social relevance registered because the audience knew the material.

In some sense Sklar was following in the tradition of Arthur Miller's notion of tragedy and the common man. Miller stated that "the common man is as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as [Greek] kings were."⁶⁸¹ Tindall was certainly a "common man" trapped in a tragic progression of events. But Tindall's death was not a result of hubris, but of self-sacrifice.

Student Audiences and the American Playwrights Theatre

As it turned out, the primary audience for Sklar's play was college students, who were taking an increasingly active role in social protest. Arnold Aronson captured the scope of the period with an apposite description, characterizing it as:

The festering dark underside of the American century—racial inequality, poverty in the midst of plenty, the threat of nuclear holocaust, and ultimately political assassinations and the disastrous involvement in Vietnam—bubbled to the surface as the nation faced civil rights demonstrations, race riots, anti-war marches, acts of anti-establishment violence, and the emergence of a so-called "counterculture," which was the product of the youthful

⁶⁸⁰ COFO was an umbrella organization composed of various civil rights groups working independently in Mississippi.

⁶⁸¹ Arthur Miller, "Tragedy and the Common Man," *New York Times*, February 27, 1949, X1.

rebelliousness and idealism of the demographically explosive “baby-boom” generation.⁶⁸²

It was argued in the 1960s that “American college and university theatre has come to mold the dramatic taste of the theatre-going public.”⁶⁸³ Theatre on university campuses had a built-in audience that was prepared to listen to anyone who could enlighten them on political, social, and racial problems. It is almost a forgotten fact that white college students valued and appreciated Malcolm X; they were among his favorite and most enthusiastic audiences. In 1964, Malcolm X was the second most sought-after speaker on college campuses.⁶⁸⁴ Barry Goldwater was the first. This was the era when students began to actively participate in civil rights functions and to debate civil rights issues; they were not only exposed to radical black speakers but also to more theatre--*And People All Around* benefited from all of that.

This youthful rebelliousness was most active on college campuses around the United States. Because of the American Playwrights Theatre, tens of thousands of students saw Sklar’s play. In 1964, even the Ripon Society, a Republican research group, noted that “the conscience of America--and especially young America—has been struck.”⁶⁸⁵ Legal scholar Lani Guinier commented on the students of that time:

They [students] influenced the tactics in all kinds of ways: what they did in terms of the march from Selma to Montgomery and the relationship between SNCC and SCLC; what they did in terms of Birmingham; what they did in the context of Atlanta—where they took a much more direct, and perhaps, militant position. In some ways, since they were so far out in front, the mainstream leaders in the black community ended up following them in order to salvage their own reputations, especially in Atlanta.... The students couched their demands in very eloquent terms. They were very thoughtful. I believe their demands were presented in a column in

⁶⁸² Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-garde: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 75.

⁶⁸³ William I. Oliver, “Writing for Values,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 12, no. 3 (October 1960): 199.

⁶⁸⁴ Robert E. Terrill, “White Guy, Black Texts: Appropriateness and Appropriation across Racial Difference,” *Rhetoric Review* 20, no. 1/2 (Spring 2001): 57.

⁶⁸⁵ “G.O.P. Moderates Score Goldwater,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1964, 31.

the black newspaper. They were presented in such a way that they had to be taken seriously.⁶⁸⁶

The empowered student culture that emerged during the 1960s identified with and offered legitimacy to the political imperatives of the Civil Rights Movement, activity that is well documented in books about the Movement from such authors as Mary King⁶⁸⁷ and Doug McAdam.⁶⁸⁸ This student audience, which was an important component in the success of the Civil Rights Movement, was an ideal one for *And People All Around*. Sklar acknowledged that point: “Whatever the future of this play, it’s doing a job on audiences that see it—and I keep thanking my stars there’s an APT [American Playwrights Theatre] to get it to these kids in the universities. They’ll be the ones who’ll bring sanity to the (play’s) question.”⁶⁸⁹

According to Sklar, “Between December 4, 1966, and May of 1968, there were over one hundred and eight productions by college, community and resident groups affiliated with APT.”⁶⁹⁰ The American Playwrights Theatre,⁶⁹¹ the national nonprofit service agency, was founded by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee in 1963 to provide emerging and established dramatists with production opportunities. Before the birth of APT, headquartered at Ohio State University (Columbus), college theatres had done very little for contemporary playwrights. Now, under its auspices, playwrights agreed to write plays designed specifically to be developed and produced in college, regional, and community theatres around the country. Playwrights such as William Saroyan, Elmer Rice, and Horton Foote committed to write plays or submit unproduced scripts; many theatres signed on to participate in the project, which would inevitably stimulate increased activity, with far-reaching implications. John Gassner, Harold Clurman, and

⁶⁸⁶ Lani Guinier, interview with author (December 12, 2007).

⁶⁸⁷ Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1987).

⁶⁸⁸ Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁶⁸⁹ “APT Play Stirs up the Klan,” *Dramatists Guild Quarterly* (Winter 1967).

⁶⁹⁰ Sklar, “Author Returns to Theatre,” G2

⁶⁹¹ Several other plays produced by APT were Ron Cowen’s *Summertime*; James Yaffe and Jerome Weidman’s *Ivory Tower*; George Williams’ *Smorling Gru*; Robert Anderson’s *The Days Between*; and Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee’s *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*.

Alan Schneider were among the many judges during the early years of APT.⁶⁹² The American Playwrights Theatre, sponsored by the American National Theatre and Academy (ANTA), American Educational Theater Association, and Ohio State University, provided the playwright with anywhere from fifty to more than one hundred productions of the accepted play. Each theatre, advancing approximately \$200 against royalties to the playwrights, made the venture a worthwhile financial arrangement for them.

Stanley Young, executive director of ANTA, stated that the greatest challenge of the American Playwrights Theatre was to create a “new kind of play, a play which is shaped especially for intelligent university audiences.”⁶⁹³ *And People All Around*, which was selected for one of the 1966-67 slots, was the exemplary play for such an audience. APT, with student audiences as its primary target, was “designed to stimulate and develop the production of serious drama in university and community theaters across the nation.”⁶⁹⁴ It suffices to use one critic to summarize and capture what many critics acknowledged about the impact of *And People All Around* on the student audience:

How absorbing was reflected in the immense attention rewarded the opening performance by the dominantly student audience. These young, alert faces were concentration for what has been going on since they were born. They were catching up, justification alone for Sklar’s work.⁶⁹⁵

The American Playwrights Theatre production of *And People All Around* on college campuses facilitated cultural intervention by opening up a spectrum of debates among students to discuss pertinent civil rights issues. A press release relating to a production at the University of Minnesota invited students to a forum: *The Civil Rights Issue: Does It Belong in the Theater and*

⁶⁹² Louis Calta, “93 Troupes Across U.S. Join Playwright Theater Program,” *New York Times*, February 19, 1964, 31.

⁶⁹³ Louis Calta, “8 Writers Back College Drama,” *New York Times*, October 26, 1963, 18.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹⁵ Richard L. Coe, “Provocative Drama at AU,” *Washington Post*, December 10, 1966, C5.

*Does It Belong in Minnesota?*⁶⁹⁶ Theatre scholar Bruce McConachie, who as a student acted in that production, commented on the political activism of students in the 1960s:

Lots of students were "political" in a general sense in 1967. I know that the Civil Rights Movement made me optimistic that "the system" could be challenged and changed. I expect that my engagement with the politics of the play built on that optimism.⁶⁹⁷

McConachie went on to reveal how the play affected him:

I don't know what impact the civil rights content of *And People All Around* had on the cast as a whole, but it did have an impact on me. I had been an activist as an undergraduate and even marched with Martin Luther King in Detroit. I was happy to be involved.⁶⁹⁸

One central factor in the countercultural trend and its association with theatre was that this was an era of decentralization in theatre. That factor, with an increase of theatres on campuses around the country, made it possible for students to be introduced to and engaged with civil rights issues.

In 1968, two years after the premiere of *And People All Around*, Bernard Beckerman, representing the United States at an international conference, stated that American theatre "audiences have increased opportunities for playgoing through resident theatres, professional university theatres, festival theatres, etc. Moreover, private and public agencies have undertaken the responsibility for bringing theatre to communities which had little or no access to live performances."⁶⁹⁹ The proliferation of theatres, as well as the increased exposure of audiences to theatre, that Beckerman refers to was an indispensable part of the theatre environment of the 1960s.

⁶⁹⁶ Press Release, "The Civil Rights Issue: Does It Belong in the Theater and Does It Belong in Minnesota," January 31, 1967. Appendix 38, 328.

⁶⁹⁷ Bruce McConachie, interview with author (July 19, 2007).

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Francis Hodge, "Group II: Theatre and Its Developing Audience," in International Conference on Theatre Education and Development, *Educational Theatre Journal* 20, no. 2 (August 1968): 271.

Decentralization was the term applied to this ongoing change in the theatre; everybody was writing about this “healthy development for the American theatre,” from Walter Kerr⁷⁰⁰ and Kenneth T. Rowe⁷⁰¹ (who taught Arthur Miller playwriting at the University of Michigan) to Richard Rodgers⁷⁰² and Stanley Kauffmann.⁷⁰³ While Harold Clurman communicated the burgeoning of theatrical activism best,

Still another recent development in theatrical affairs furnishes cause for hope. The growing decentralization of our theater, the spread of permanent, sometimes endowed, groups all over the country—in Minneapolis, Seattle, Memphis, Houston, San Francisco, Oklahoma City, Milwaukee, Washington, Dallas and New York—is of inestimable value.⁷⁰⁴

It was Joseph Roach who later shared what that decentralization meant to the young audience:

We were a blessed generation of theatre students, changing the world. Part of that boundless revolution, of course, which we confidently aspired both to bring about and to build our careers on would be the total decentralization of the American theatre from New York into the vast network of regional repertory theatres, many of them located on university campuses.⁷⁰⁵

Economist William Baumol, who wrote about the increased building of theatres in his influential book *Performing Arts, The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theater, Opera, Music and Dance*, confirmed that decentralization was a central issue in his valuable research while preparing for his book. Baumol talks about the boom during the 1960s:

The growth in theatres, that is theatre construction, was partly a response to the new legislation and partly the sudden fashion for cultural centers. There was a proliferation of them and many of them have turned out to be very valuable and very effective. But, then, others went to the other extreme—with people having gotten the building with no ideas what to put into them. And there are

⁷⁰⁰ Walter Kerr, “Back-to-Campus Plan Questioned for Playwrights,” *Washington Post and Times-Herald*, September 17, 1961, G1.

⁷⁰¹ Kenneth T. Rowe, “From the Campus,” *New York Times*, August 19, 1962, 93.

⁷⁰² Richard Rodgers, “Yes, There’s a Fresh Wind Blowing and It Carries the Sound of Music,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1964, N94.

⁷⁰³ Stanley Kauffmann, “Out There in America,” *New York Times*, January 30, 1966, X1.

⁷⁰⁴ Harold Clurman, “Where Are the New Playwrights? ‘Waiting,’” *New York Times*, June 7, 1964, 117.

⁷⁰⁵ Joseph Roach, “Reconstructing Theatre History,” *Theatre Topics* 9, no. 1 (1999): 6.

many places in the U.S. where they stand in magnificent emptiness.⁷⁰⁶

One of the strongest components of decentralization was the boom in construction of theatres by colleges and universities throughout the country.⁷⁰⁷

Beyond being a product of the Civil Rights Movement, *And People All Around* was a constituent of theatre decentralization. One critic noted: “What could turn out to be one of the more important thrusts toward decentralization of the problem-beset American theater has taken shape in a new organization called the American Playwrights Theatre.”⁷⁰⁸ During its month-long run at Oakland University in Michigan, for example, approximately 16,000 (mostly students) saw the play.⁷⁰⁹

Sklar understood the importance of students, the future leaders, but he also wanted current political leaders to see the play. In a letter regarding a Washington, DC, production, Sklar suggested a rather unrealistic list of names:

I hope your Roger Stevens contact will be able to get a few people there—people who are interested in promoting the arts. Senator Javits’ wife is a theatre buff for instance and it would be fun if we could get Bobby and Ted Kennedy there. We certainly should be able to get Thurgood Marshall, the solicitor general. And lame-duck Senator Douglas has nothing to lose, or Congressman Weltner of Georgia, who refused to endorse Maddox. Congressmen like Ryan and Celler of New York, who have been energetic on civil rights...and civil rights people like Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and Martin Luther King.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁶ William Baumol, interview with author (November 19, 2007).

⁷⁰⁷ Andres Briggs, “Repertory Group Praised,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1966, SG8.

⁷⁰⁸ Theodore Strongin, “Beyond Manhattan,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1964, X1.

⁷⁰⁹ Arnold Rosenfeld, “College Where Football Is Upstaged,” *Sun*, March 31, 1968, D1.

⁷¹⁰ George Sklar to Dave (David H.) Ayers [executive director, American playwrights TheatreAmerican playwrights Theatre], November 28, 1966. Appendix 39, 329-331.

The Civil Rights Movement: Disseminating a Message

“It is self-evident that a play must communicate or it is not a play at all,”⁷¹¹ claimed scholar John L. Styan. If *And People All Around* was primarily intended to effect social change, then its success must be measured by social change. In the *New York Times*, critic Stanley Kauffmann⁷¹² argued that drama could neither do good nor bring about change. Sklar took exception to Kauffmann’s review and sent a letter to the editor of the *Times*, stating:

Mr. Kauffmann seems to think that the audience for *And People All Around*, especially university audiences, are by the very fact of their presence already convinced. I don’t pretend to have Mr. Kauffmann’s occult powers of audience perception, but I did see four performances of the Tufts production; I watched the audiences; I saw individuals stalk out in indignation; I saw many moved to tears.

Twenty-five girls and boys from the “Upward Bound” project, an integrated program for underprivileged 17- and 18-year-olds preparing to enter college, came to each of the first two performances. The director of the project reports that they came back each night in such a ferment that they stayed up till three in the morning arguing and discussing it. Two cynical young men in the program who have been maintaining that the whole issue of civil rights has been blown up and that things aren’t nearly as bad as the papers say, came out of a performance silent and sobered. They are no longer claiming these things didn’t happen.

One of the faculty members, a young lady of twenty-five, was so shaken that she ran straight from the theatre to her room and sobbed for half an hour. Three days later she told me that she was reading civil rights literature and was determined to do something active about it.

A director from a nearby university theatre said he’d never spent a more terrifying evening in a theatre. He couldn’t sleep, realized finally that after serving in the last war, he’d come to accept the idea that the killing of man by man is an inevitable and immutable fact of life. Seeing the brutality and killing in the play and hearing it discussed in a public situation struck at his conscience and reopened the question.

⁷¹¹John L. Styan, *Drama, Stage and Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 1.

⁷¹² Stanley Kauffmann, “Can Theater Do Any Good?” *New York Times*, August 7, 1966, 85.

There were many others who came out stunned and “shook-up”—among them six nuns who thanked me for writing the play.⁷¹³

This could easily be a case of the playwright challenging the critic, which creates difficulties determining the effectiveness of the dramatic message. In defense of Sklar, his letter to the editor of the *New York Times* was his attempt to illuminate the impact that *And People All Around* had, he believed, on audiences. Sklar commented on his satisfaction with the audiences in many of his letters.

What’s become apparent to me after seeing six productions is that the impact is so intense that people go home talking about the play and keep talking to their friends. So that the word of mouth is immediate. And it’s so persuasive that many who are put off by the subject came out of curiosity. It enters the life of the community—as the review suggests—and, of course, I’m delighted.⁷¹⁴

It [the audience] sat tense, and silent through the first act, so stunned that it didn’t know whether to applaud or not at its conclusion. It filed out in absolute silence for the intermission. At the end of the play there was another moment of uncertainty—then someone started the applause and it built and sustained for eight curtain calls and was still at its peak when the house lights came on. Finally, it dribbled off only to start again—with the light on! It became an ovation with shouts of author! And I had to take a bow. Then it was announced that I’d answer questions for any who wanted to stay. And damned if the whole audience didn’t remain...The question of silence in the face of such monstrous injustice was discussed and compared with the silence of the Germans during Hitler’s regime.⁷¹⁵

Robert Brustein, who was an assistant professor of dramatic literature at Columbia University in the 1960s, stated the same idea as Kauffmann did in 1960, acknowledging that theatre could not produce the change.⁷¹⁶ In 1961, critic Howard Taubman was in opposition to Kauffmann and

⁷¹³ George Sklar, letter to the editor [unpublished], *New York Times*, August 7, 1966. Appendix 40, 332-333. Sklar also sent a copy of the letter to Dave Ayers. It is in the American Playwrights Theatre papers at Ohio State University.

⁷¹⁴ George Sklar to Dave Ayers, February 28, 1967. Appendix 41, 334-335.

⁷¹⁵ George Sklar to Dave Ayers, November 21, 1966. Appendix 42, 336-340.

⁷¹⁶ Robert Brustein, “French and American Drama Compared,” *New York Times*, July 10, 1960, X1.

Brustein, arguing, “The theatre certainly can be a powerful and influential place.”⁷¹⁷ Richard Rodgers also weighed in on the argument, arguing that musical theatre could do great things and be very influential.⁷¹⁸

In 1965, theatre critic Norman Nadel wrote, “We need the playwright to sharpen our awareness. We need him to needle us, to unsettle us, and help us come to honest terms with the turbulent world in which we live.”⁷¹⁹ This was Sklar’s mission: he offered a drama that attempted to engage, educate, and move his audience. Even Kauffmann, who argued that the theatre of social import can serve as sustenance and stimulus, admits that is what Sklar’s drama accomplished.⁷²⁰

Conclusion: *And People All Around* and Its Civil Rights Movement Distinction

Numerous aspects locate *And People All Around* in the solid category of a Civil Rights Movement drama. While many have been discussed here, to conclude, one aspect deserves special attention. The Civil Rights Movement embodied a philosophical foundation to integrate black artists into the mainstream of America’s cultural world. *And People All Around* epitomizes cultural democracy because you have a committed white artist transcending racial barriers, writing about the politics that most affected blacks. During the 1930s, Walter White of the NAACP wrote Sherwood Anderson to ask if he had a script about black life that the Harlem’s Lafayette Theatre might produce. Anderson replied that he did not.⁷²¹ It is unthinkable of any blacks in the 1960s asking a white writer if he had a script about black life.

The 1960s was a period in which blacks accentuated black pride and were very serious about black ownership of cultural material. This is to say that Sklar’s dramatizing what some would

⁷¹⁷ Howard Taubman, “Themes of Our Day,” *New York Times*, September 3, 1961, X1.

⁷¹⁸ Richard Rodgers, “Now the Musical Theatre Is Enshrined,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1964, SM20.

⁷¹⁹ Norman Nadel, “A Courageous Playwright,” *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, August 31, 1965. 17.

⁷²⁰ Kauffmann, “Can Theater Do Any Good?” 85.

⁷²¹ Sherwood Anderson to Walter White, April 25, 1938, Administrative Files, Federal Theatre and Writers Project, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

have considered black political material in the 1960s would have been more tabooed during the tenacious Black Nationalist phase of the Civil Rights Movement than during the 1930s. Despite the nationalist's creed of black literary ownership, Sklar was not accused of appropriating material, and he probed his diverse material with adroitness. He was not out to be a defiant individual; as an artist, he integrated himself and his art into politics.

What was significant about Sklar and his drama is that he validated that progressive whites were as committed and united as blacks when it came to the political aspirations of the Civil Rights Movement. While using his art as a societal asset and relying on the theatre as a civic agency, Sklar fused vitality and commitment with a cultural and political maturity as he communicated with an audience that was just like him. In other words, he did not represent the *other*. Sklar did not point a finger at his audience saying "you must change." His implication was "we must change." This was not even the most moderate black speaking to a white audience; it was one of its own members speaking. The exhortative *we* excluded the *us against them* hypothesis.

Alison Brysk argues that a "message can foment political change by creating an alternative reality, transferring daily experience to a different realm in which it is valued and thus opening the recipient to consider a new social order."⁷²² There was no better strategy than for the message to be delivered by someone representing the *sameness*. Considering the formation of white hegemony, whites did play a role in the complicated transition from Jim Crow to integration. Thus, *And People All Around*, via Sklar as the messenger, played a vital role in dissolving racism/white supremacy and also earned a place in a national narrative for democratic justice.

⁷²² Alison Brysk, "Hearts and Minds: Bringing Symbolic Politics Back In," *Polity* 27, no. 4 (Summer 1995): 577.

Finally, the Civil Rights Movement era was the phase of American history that challenged racist assumptions and racist beliefs while dismantling a racist pedagogy. This was the phase of American history that inherited a cultural politics that challenged the moral conscience of the nation, which ultimately led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. During this unprecedented phase, the media brought news and images into homes that horrified millions of Americans, stirring while simultaneously searing the conscience of a nation. In the mix of that charged political environment, Sklar (by dramatizing an incident that activated the nation's conscience) played an influential role in augmenting the significance of the theatre as a cultural entity that matters. That Sklar and the theatre mattered at the time when it meant something special is itself significant.

Conclusion

The Civil Rights Movement was synonymous with political protest—protest framed around tenets that stressed dignity, respect, and equality. While the Movement has been credited with remarkable accomplishments, ranging from the toppling of Jim Crow to ushering in new racial perceptions, at its core was the protest over power. The premise underlying the success of the Civil Rights Movement was that power should be shared equitably. Arthur Miller observed that “power changes everything.”⁷²³ Power, as the leaders of the Movement understood, went well beyond the political and encompassed cultural, economic, and social power as well. This unique Movement, which triggered analogous movements internationally, challenged the hegemonic power of the privileged class, seeking instead a shared power with an oppressed, powerless group struggling against momentous obstacles. That was most apparent in the battles over education, housing, and voting.

Much of the Civil Rights Movement ultimately advanced a liberal politics seeking progressive changes for African Americans. What is often overlooked, and what this dissertation demonstrates, is that cultural leaders (artists) were as significant as political leaders in bringing about changes. During the Civil Rights Movement era, politics and culture shared in the same narrative of change; cultural and political actions were intertwined and both were integral in dismantling the established and oppressive aspects of the political system. Of all aspects of culture, it was theatre that was most specifically focused on effecting political, social, and economic change. While some examples of politicized art and theatre simply reflected the views and ideology of individual artists, quite frequently there was a very specific attempt at coordinating artistic endeavor with political agendas and strategies. A noteworthy example can be found in the connection between the Free Southern Theater and the Student Nonviolent

⁷²³ Arthur Miller, *On Politics and the Art of Acting* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 62. The speech was first delivered as the 30th Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities for the National Endowment for the Humanities on March 26, 2001.

Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The Free Southern Theater was founded in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963 by John O’Neal, Doris Derby, and Gilbert Moses specifically to advance the goals of SNCC. Free Southern Theater set out to create an audience and to assist the Movement, as O’Neal explained:

The slogan we used was, “theatre for those who have no theatre.” It helped us define ourselves. We thought the most important audience would be the audience of those people who were most directly engaged in the Movement, and that we would encourage the critical thinking among these people so that the Movement could be made better.⁷²⁴

O’Neal’s objective, to stimulate critical thinking in order to improve the Movement, was a fundamental example of connecting politics and culture.

As this dissertation demonstrates, theatre dramatized civil rights messages, disseminated information, encouraged involvement, advocated participation, and played a crucial role in generating activism, which was vital to the success of the Movement. The dramatists, who created these works, were actively engaged in challenging the dominant institutions that were antagonistic to their causes. The five main plays of this dissertation are exemplary of dramas that alerted audiences to racial problems; essentially, they were written to provoke thought on the part of the audience. While that does not necessarily mean that the plays served didactic or propagandistic purposes, they provoked protest while educating audiences about civil rights issues. These playwrights saw theatre as a powerful cultural instrument for exploring particular concerns of the Civil Rights Movement.

Albert Guérard argues that “The artist does not suffer from being identified with a cause; if the cause is himself, a vital part of himself, it is also a fit element in his art.”⁷²⁵ The contributions of the playwrights represented in this dissertation often went beyond the writing of plays. They did

⁷²⁴ John O’Neal, interview with author (October 15, 2008).

⁷²⁵ Albert L. Guérard, *Art for Art’s Sake* (New York: Schocken, 1936), 215.

a great deal to generate money and often donated funds and other, unacknowledged, items. For example, as noted in chapter 3, Lorraine Hansberry worked with SNCC, helping them to create a photo documentary of the struggle (*The Movement*, 1964). She produced the book, wrote the text, and donated all proceeds to SNCC. Also, money raised for a SNCC benefit bought the car that Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner were driving when they were kidnapped.⁷²⁶

As David Savran has stated, "[Arthur] Miller has consistently dedicated his writing to the exploration of manifestly political issues, including the alienation and commodification of the individual subject in bourgeois society, the mechanics of ostracism, and the ethics of informing on one's own colleagues."⁷²⁷ Like Miller, each playwright represented in this dissertation made a political commitment and encouraged audiences to embrace the charged political moment, to take responsibility for their society, and to act on their beliefs. In each drama, there is a call for activism, urging audiences to participate in the social changes that would rectify some of the ills of racism.

The era of the Civil Rights Movement was marked by an increasing activism on the part of artists. "Writers at least are speaking out more forcefully and more frequently on today's public issues," noted an article in the *New York Times*.⁷²⁸ Pulitzer Prize-winning author Archibald MacLeish declared that the writer's work and politics were inseparable: "If all a writer does is sign an ad, if his position toward public affairs doesn't involve his work, then what he's doing is a lot of hooey."⁷²⁹ None of the playwrights covered here could be accused of "hooey." Loftin Mitchell tackled the issue of education; Lorraine Hansberry addressed the housing issue; Ossie Davis confronted racism with satire; Amiri Baraka channeled his anger to advocate militancy;

⁷²⁶ Steven R. Carter, *Hansberry's Drama: Commitment amid Complexity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), x.

⁷²⁷ David Savran, *Communists, Cowboys, and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 21.

⁷²⁸ Elliott Carlson, "Writers & Politics," *New York Times*, January 23, 1965, 16.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*

and George Sklar examined black voter registration. Those writers, committed to their causes, made it possible for theatre to claim a place in the most important movement of the century. Their plays provided audiences with a new understanding of politics, and because of the collective nature of theatre stimulated a political and cultural transformation.

Worthwhile plays have always attempted to enact change while engaging their audiences; worthwhile theatre has always dealt with the dreams and struggles of the downtrodden and oppressed. The theatre of the Civil Rights Movement era exercised its political potential to effect change. While this dissertation argues for the change brought about by shaping the aesthetic experiences of audience members, it acknowledges that assessing the impact of the arts is a difficult and complicated process. Eric Bentley notes as much when he argues that the influences of playwrights are only marginal when considering societal changes.⁷³⁰ Nonetheless, the contributions of theatre to the changes effected by the Civil Rights Movement were palpable, and these playwrights played a significant role in bringing about those changes. Culture weighed heavily in the political arena. The NAACP advocated education, CORE targeted poor housing, SNCC rallied around voter registration, and in all those causes, playwrights espoused their ideas and goals. The dramatists took an active approach, identifying social or political issues, and called for change while arousing a political consciousness. Thus, culture and politics were intertwined, amplifying a fundamental American value that resonated with diverse elements of the whole society. These dramas played a vital role in creating the public space for an emerging new identity, the “new Americanism,” a politics that was more conducive to the ideal of democracy.

The Civil Rights Movement was the specific period in American history when theatre mattered most (specifically to blacks)--when theatre actually reflected the politics of the time. It

⁷³⁰ Eric Bentley, interview with author (June 16, 2012).

was the era when plays by white dramatists would no longer monopolize the ideas and values emerging from theatres. Black dramatists took a stance, supporting a political and cultural framework that offered their artistic expressions. Nikolai Evreinov emphasized that “theatre is a human impulse necessary to a healthy living,”⁷³¹ a concept black dramatists were actively connecting to. The Evreinovian aesthetics associates the *human impulse* with theatre more than with other art forms and that is what made theatre so central to the progress of the Civil Rights Movement. At the time when it mattered most, theatre was not only examining the self-worth of each individual and the very core of a society, it was also taking an active role in curing the ills in society. In other words, theatre was interacting with society when it needed it most and black playwrights were actively playing a role in the healing process as never before.

⁷³¹ Phil Jones, *Drama as Therapy: Theory, Practice and Research (Theatre as Living)*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), xviii.

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Appendices

Freedom and Equality Now!
Contextualizing the Nexus between the Civil Rights Movement and Drama

Appendix 1

DeLaine among Dr. Martin Luther King and other leaders (April 30, 1962)

THE BAPTIST MINISTER'S CONFERENCE
 OF PHILADELPHIA AND VICINITY
Presents Its
"PRESIDENT'S FIRST AWARD NIGHT"




at

IRVINE AUDITORIUM
 34th and Spruce Streets

.....


Monday, April 30, 1962
 8:00 P.M.




HONORING

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., *President of SCLC*
 MISS MAHALIA JACKSON, *International Gospel Singer*
 MR. JAMES L. FARMER, *Director of CORE*
 MR. JACKIE ROBINSON, *Baseball Hall of Fame*
 REV. JOSEPH A. DeLAINE, *Veteran Integration Leader*
 RT. REV. GEORGE W. BABER, *Bishop of the AME Church*
 MR. MILTON J. SHAPP, *Philanthropist Directed to Negro Education*

Music to be rendered by a 350 Voice Choir under the direction of
NAPPER H. HESTER, III
 Rev. L. C. Smith, Chairman of Music Committee



THE PUBLIC IS INVITED

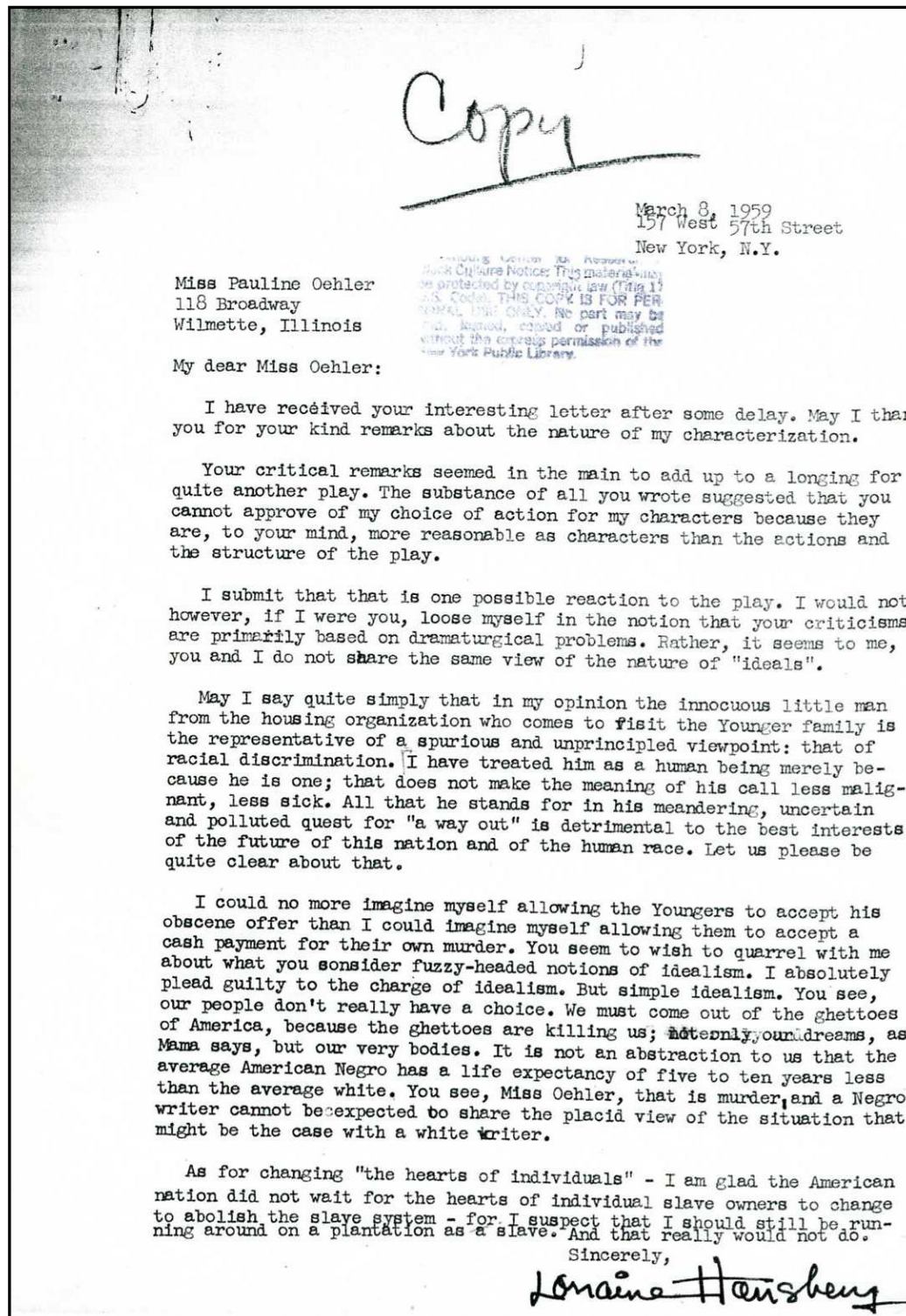


Admission by
Free Courtesy Tickets

J. Earl Adkins, *President*
 M. L. Shepard, Jr., *Gen. Chairman* — J. A. White, *Co-Chairman* — L. S. McNeil, *Co-Chairman*
Co-Operating Organization: The AME Preachers' Meeting of Philadelphia and Vicinity
 Rev. L. S. McNeil, *President*

Appendix 2

Lorraine Hansberry to Pauline Oehler (March 8, 1959)



Appendix 3

Speech by Claudia McNeil (November 12, 1959)

Reproduced From the Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Remarks of Miss Claudia McNeil, Star of
"A Raisin In The Sun," Belmont Plaza
Hotel, 49th Street and Lexington Avenue,
New York, New York, Thursday, November 12,
1959, 5:00 to 7:00 PM

This year the NAACP celebrates its fiftieth birthday. It has been, I believe, a glorious, dramatic, and meaningful half century of life, but one which may not be considered ended. The final chapter has yet to be written. Much remains to be done.

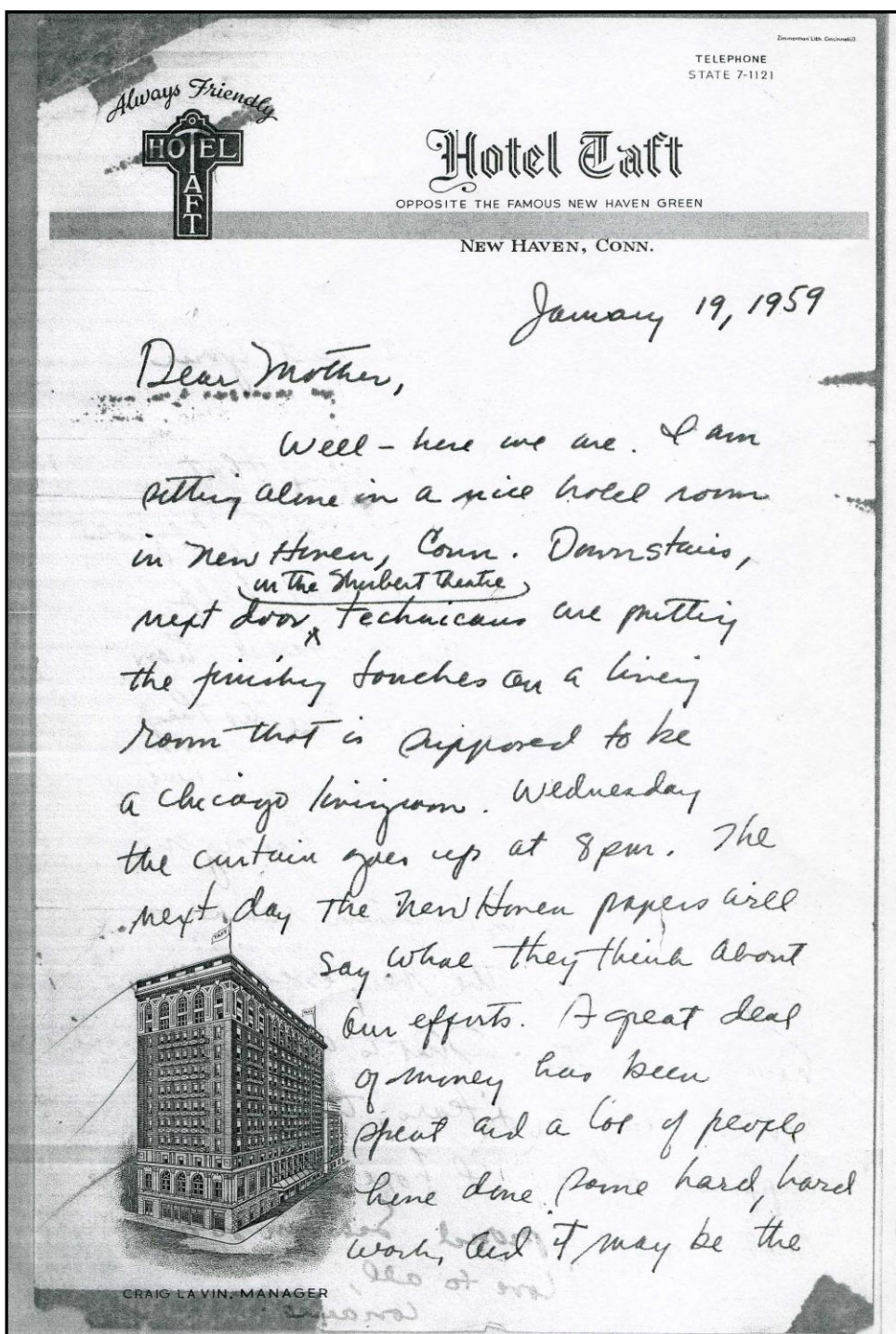
There are children of minority groups still to be sent to adequate, integrated and well staffed schools. There are workers still being denied employment opportunities because of race and creed. There are Negro and minority families still trying to find decent housing in non-ghetto neighborhoods. There are Negro Americans still struggling to gain their constitutional rights to vote in the U. S. A. The NAACP still has a great deal to do in the defense and extension of human rights.

You and your club members can directly add your help to the enormous program that still remains, by attending the Freedom Fund Dinner on Sunday, December 6, 1959, in the Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Commodore, here in New York City. An excellent program is being planned for your entertainment ---- a highlight of which is the honoring of the celebrated singer Marian Anderson and Gardner Cowles, publisher of LOOK Magazine.

I am confident that our press and radio will join us in publicizing this coming gala event.

Appendix 4

Lorraine Hansberry, Correspondence and Personal Papers, Box 2, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, letter to her mother, January 19, 1959.



beginning of many different careers.

The actors are very good and the director is a very talented man - so if it is a poor show I won't be able to blame a soul but your youngest daughter.

Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes & life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are - & just as mixed up - but above all, that we have among our miserable & down trodden ranks - people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what, after all the laughter & tears, the play is supposed to say. I hope it will make you very proud. See you soon
Love to all,
Lorraine

The Curtain

C O P Y

HOTEL TAFT
New Haven, Conn.

January 19, 1959

Dear Mother,

Well - here we are. I am sitting alone in a nice hotel room in New Haven, Conn. Downstairs, next door, in the Shubert Theatre, technicians are putting the finishing touches on a living room that is supposed to be a Chicago living room. Wednesday the curtain goes up at 8 p.m. The next day the New Haven papers will say what they think about our efforts. A great deal of money has been spent and a lot of people have done some hard, hard work. And it may be the beginning of many different careers.

The actors are very good and the director is a very talented man - so if it is a poor show I won't be able to blame a soul but your youngest daughter.

Mama, it is a play that tells the truth about people, Negroes and life and I think it will help a lot of people to understand how we are just as complicated as they are - and just as mixed up - but above all, that we have among our miserable and downtrodden ranks - people who are the very essence of human dignity. That is what, after all the laughter and tears, the play is supposed to say. I hope it will make you very proud. See you soon.

Love to all,

(signed) Lorraine

Appendix 5

John Gassner to Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board (March 28, 1959)

*Report of the Drama Jury for Pulitzer
Prizes in 1959*

JOHN GASSNER

March 28, 1959

Professor John Hohenberg
School of Journalism
Columbia University
New York 27, New York

Dear Professor Hohenberg:

I am now ready to make my recommendation to the Pulitzer Prize Committee, and I am sure that I shall cause no particular surprise by declaring myself very strongly in favor of J. B. by Archibald MacLeish.

J. B. is the first poetic drama of genuine distinction to have been written by an American poet who has remained American in every fiber of his thought and artistry. In giving the Pulitzer Prize to this work the Committee would be honoring a distinguished poet at the very climax of his career, and it would be giving recognition to an effort, an extremely rare effort indeed, to bring high thought, deep sincerity, and literary accomplishment to the American theatre.

Even a moderate estimate, influenced by some reservations and some dissatisfaction with the second act, would have to concede that much. But actually we should have to add to our estimate the author's fine theatrical imagination; his blending of the universal with the particular in giving the tragedy of guiltless suffering a contemporary significance that no one aware of World War II and fascism-communism massacres of the innocents can possibly overlook; and his affirmativeness in the very teeth of those who glutted the market of ideas and beliefs with counsels of despair and decadent seductions.

Moreover, I do not believe there are any alternatives to which we owe more than passing thought. Surely the Committee could not give any serious consideration to Sweet Bird of Youth; this Tennessee Williams play suffers from false values, bad taste, and fractured dramaturgy, and these are faults that no amount of excitement can compensate. A Raisin in the Sun is a worthy enough slice-of-life and an honest picture of Negro life is to be commended; but this first play by a twenty-eight-year-old girl does not greatly rise above the level of low-grade

JOHN GASSNER

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realistic drama of surfaces and commonplaces. Norman Corwin's The Rivalry commands respect, but this play is largely biographical-historical pastiche. The enticements of Rashomon are, in the main, synthetic. And A Touch of the Poet would put the Committee in the position of honoring a dead and already honored playwright for his second-rate work. I must conclude, therefore, that J. B. is the only play I can recommend to the Committee as the logical choice; we honor ourselves and honor the intent of the donor of the Pulitzer Prizes in giving recognition to this work.

Yours sincerely,

John Gassner

Appendix 6

John Mason Brown to Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board (March 24, 1959)

1 — Report of the ~~Advisory~~ ^{Drama} Jury for Pulitzer
 4/15/52 Prizes on 1959

JOHN MASON BROWN
 17 EAST 89TH STREET
 NEW YORK 28, N. Y.

March 24, 1959

Advisory Board on Pulitzer Prizes
 Columbia University
 New York 27, N. Y.

Dear Sirs:

I am delighted to learn from John Gassner that he admires Archibald MacLeish's J.B. as much as I do. You may remember that Brooks Atkinson in his first-night review saluted it as "one of the memorable works of the century as verse, as drama, and as spiritual inquiry." This may well prove extravagant as praise and hurried as prophecy. But certainly no other play of this or many seasons has attempted to come to grips with so large and universal a theme and succeeded in stating it in terms more eloquent, moving, and provocative.

That MacLeish's J.B. has its deficiencies which in print can be recognized more easily than in Elia Kazan's brilliant staging of it, I do not deny. Yet these expected deficiencies appear to me to be insignificant and almost irrelevant when compared to the audacity of MacLeish's reach and the power of his achievement.

MacLeish has explained his aim in J.B. by saying that he has constructed "a modern play inside the ancient majesty of the Book of Job, much as the Bedouins, thirty years ago, used to build within the towering ruins of Palmyra their shacks of gasoline tins roofed with fallen stones." As cannot be stressed too often, he has not attempted a reconstruction of Job. He has turned to the theme because he says it is the only one he knows which fits our modern history. He is stating the parallel between the trials which overtake his successful American businessman, J.B., and those "enormous, nameless disasters that have befallen whole cities, entire peoples, in two great wars and many small ones," destroying the innocent together with the guilty and with no "cause" our minds can grasp.

An immediate and striking difference between the Book of Job and MacLeish's contemporary statement of its theme is that, whereas Job's comforters undertook to comfort him by persuading him against his inner conviction that he was guilty, J.B.'s comforters deny him the consolation of guilt.

Naturally, J.B., a man who continues to believe, wants to think there must be a reason for his wretchedness.

JOHN MASON BROWN

17 EAST 89th STREET
NEW YORK 28, N. Y.

Advisory Board on Pulitzer Prizes

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"Show me my guilt, oh God!" he cries. But, since he has not been guilty, his guilt cannot be shown to him and his sufferings seem without reason. It is then that he rises to his ultimate wisdom which leads him and his wife to wish to re-commence their lives inspite of all the agonies they have undergone. The cause is larger than man's understanding, the pattern too big for comprehension, the will to live and the need to love are atavistic forces which survive disasters. J.B. finally achieves the wisdom of accepting acceptance "as a characteristic expression of the desperate courage with which men and women have had to live in these past strange years, are living now, and will have to live in the future."

MacLeish's dramatic devices may in the Prologue seem unduly difficult, though in production they become immediately clear. He takes two old circus vendors, Mr. Zuss and Nickles, who in turn play God and the Devil, and at times they and we hear the voice of God in this modern Morality. Within this framework MacLeish comes to the vignettes illustrating the initial happiness of J.B. and his family and the cruel testings which ultimately destroy his children and separate the father and mother until they at last are reunited. These are simply told and immensely moving. With them, almost as if they were preliminary lantern slides, MacLeish moves on to his philosophical discussions and his conclusion.

My admiration and gratitude for the play are genuine. I am overjoyed to have a distinguished poet (twice a Pulitzer-Prize winner in poetry) bring his fine talents to the stage, to hear verse so sharp, muscular and modern, and to encounter a large treatment of a large theme in a play that is immensely contemporary.

I can only say in conclusion that for me the play at the best moments had some of the theatrical excitements of Mourning Becomes Electra; in its family scenes, some of the radiant simplicities of The Green Pastures; and in its statement of man's stubborn will to survive, some of the qualities of The Skin of Our Teeth. With all my heart and head I hope the Advisory Board will select it.

Of two of the other offerings of the season, which may come up for discussion, I have this to say.

JOHN MASON BROWN

17 EAST 89th STREET
NEW YORK 28, N. Y.

Advisory Board on Pulitzer Prizes

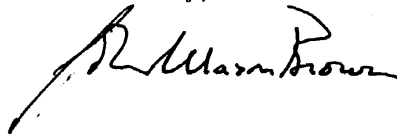
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I happen to have been moved and interested by Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun, a play about Negro life in Chicago, brilliantly acted by a Negro cast, brilliantly directed by a Negro, Lloyd Richards, and warmly written by Miss Hansberry, a Negro dramatist. But in spite of its merits and the timeliness of its theme, I must admit I do not think that its writing is on the high level that deserves a Pulitzer award. Its subject, its better scenes, and its performance should not lead us out of our sympathy to misplace our values.

I cannot imagine the Board's considering Tennessee Williams' Sweet Bird of Youth nor can I understand why the daily critics surrendered to it. I happen to agree thoroughly with the perceptive, fair, and well reasoned reviews in Time and by Kenneth Tynan in The New Yorker. Time described it as "dead cats on a cold tin roof." Do not misunderstand me. I am a true admirer of Tennessee Williams, especially the Tennessee Williams of The Glass Menagerie, A Streetcar Named Desire, and to a lesser extent Cat on a Hot Tin Roof. But of recent years he seems to me to have walked out on reality, to have poached on absurdity, and to have waded into a pond of such sliminess that I find it difficult to follow him. His brutality has ceased to be forceful and become ridiculous. His preoccupation with the death wish and castration and the sexual joys of cannibalism (unsuspected by me) in all honesty bores me. Sweet Bird is excellently acted and staged, but except at moments its writing seemed to me sententious, specious, and sloppy. My chief wish was that the play, rather than the hero, had been cut.

Perhaps the above makes clear why in my opinion no play of the season, including the two possible contenders I have mentioned, comes within miles of MacLeish's J.B. in importance, dignity, beauty, and stature.

Yours sincerely,



Appendix 7

LeRoi Jones to Lorraine Hansberry (June 13, 1961)

Totem Press

324 EAST FOURTEENTH STREET

NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK

GR34132

GR54738

13 June 1961

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Dear Lorraine Hansberry,

I read your "exchange" with Norman Mailer with a great deal of interest, &c., and I thought that you might be willing to take Mr. Mailer's suggestion seriously that the two of you, along with Jimmy Baldwin, set-to at some public place on these same issues, &c.

I have recently gotten together an organization of young men (most of whom are black, and in the arts in one way or another) and we need monies to further some of our projects. I think the two enclosures will help explain our "position", &c., on all the so called problems which beset Negroes in this country.

At any rate, I had the idea that perhaps we could get You, Jimmy, and Norman, along with W.E.B. DuBois and either Max Lerner or Roy Wilkins, to go at it at some kind of forum, for the benefit of OYM. Such an affair could possibly be held at the Judson Church or some other large space downtown or midtown. I ~~##~~ ^{have} already written letters to the other hypothetical panelists and waiting for their answers. We would like to have the thing late July or possibly early August.

I realize you must be extremely busy, &c., but I thought you might have one night to spare for such a project. Please let me know as soon as you're able. Thank you...

Best,
LeRoi Jones
LeRoi Jones

Appendix 8

LeRoi Jones's Reply to Lorraine Hansberry (June 23, 1961)

LeRoy Jones

*

Totem Press

324 EAST FOURTEENTH STREET • NEW YORK 3, NEW YORK

June 23, 1961

Dear Miss Hansberry,

Thank you for the prompt reply. Although, I must admit, I am extremely disappointed that you don't think your differences with Norman Mailer are "significant". This I find difficult to understand, i.e., that you could and would expend energies, &c., and seem to arrive at certain conclusions (even build your work on them) and yet think they are not "significant". Or, more baldly, how you can think that the differences which make ^{for} you such antithetical conclusions to Mr. Mailer's socially as well as aesthetically, can be of such little import to yourself as you say. I suppose it is as they say, i.e., talk is cheap.

To my mind, ~~the~~ the position you have made for yourself (or which the society has marked for you) is significant, if only because it represents the thinking of a great many Americans...black as well as white. Your writing comes out of and speaks for the American middleclass. Of course it is more informed ~~by~~ a peculiar group within that class, but it represents the entire class nevertheless. The critics, &c., were joyous about Raisin for exactly that reason. And as an articulate voice of an entire class you certainly do become a "leader", like it or not.

Norman Mailer has always been shrilly contemptuous of the class you represent, and now when his ideas about the so-called race problem are presented you see as he did that they are still in direct opposition to the ideas about that problem that you have voiced so often. The forum was designed, or is being designed, to at least straighten people out about the nature of your differences (re: race problems in U.S., Colonialism, Epistemic, &c.) not only with Mr. Mailer, but with W.E.B. DuBois, Max Ler-

2

her, and Jimmy Baldwin. It is an attempt to place your ideas, ie., to characterize them by delineating your individual ~~###~~philosophic approaches to these various social (and ethical) problems.

At any rate, I hope you will reconsider, and spare us one evening of your time in what I think would be a really significant event.

Best,
LeRoi Jones

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Appendix 9

Robert Brustein to Lorraine Hansberry (June 24, 1963)

ORIGINAL LETTER SENT TO CHARLES REMBAR

45 East 85th Street
New York, 28, N.Y.
24 June 1963

Lorraine Hansberry
337 Bleecker St.
New York, 14, N.Y.

Dear Miss Hansberry:

I was interested to read in the Sunday Times that you have recently completed a play, entitled The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window. Since the title character's last name is the same as mine, and since you describe him as a young Jewish intellectual with an actress wife--a pretty accurate description of my own circumstances--I thought I would write to tell you of the uncomfortable, though no doubt accidental, similarities between your fiction and myself. We have never met; I am sure you know as little of my private life as I do of yours; and, of course, these resemblances are, as they say, purely coincidental. As a matter of fact, the rest of your description ("their often hilarious, sometimes tragic confrontation of the hip and the square") has nothing to do with me at all. But since Brustein is not a common name, and the number of Brusteins in the intellectual world with actress wives is, to say the least, limited, I am certain that you will see how your use of the name is bound to evoke invidious comparisons, especially when I am myself implicated in the theatre, being drama critic for the New Republic. Might I suggest that you chance the name of your central character to something a little more fictional? Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

s/s Robert Brustein

Robert Brustein

Appendix 10

Lorraine Hansberry's reply to Robert Brustein (June 24, 1963)

Lorraine Hansberry

~~307 E. 85th Street, New York 28, New York~~

137 West 52nd Street, NYC 19 - LT 1-4320

October 25, 1963

Mr. Robert S. Brustein
45 East 85th Street
New York 28, New York

Dear Mr. Brustein:

This past summer you wrote me concerning a play of mine, THE SIGN IN SIDNEY BRUSTEIN'S WINDOW. Unfortunately, I was in the hospital at the time for major surgery or I should have replied long before this; following the operation, I am afraid the matter slipped my attention.

I am now informed your attorney has written the producers of the play to again express your concern.

As I understand it, you are troubled by the fact that the character bears the same last name as your own. It seems worthwhile, therefore, to inform you that I find this extraordinary insofar as, while the name Brustein is perhaps not a commonplace Jewish name, it is nonetheless a familiar one and one which, accordingly, suited my purpose. That is to say that more familiar names would have suggested cliché.

That you should find some personal association in this is truly amazing. There are, I believe, some 7 or 8 Brusteins in the Manhattan telephone book - and at least a dozen in the Brooklyn book. Whether any of these include your family I haven't the least idea, and find the thought that any of them should suggest chagrin at the arbitrary utilization of a name a mystery - any more than in the case of the thousands and thousands of "Jones", "Smiths", "Johnsons", "Rabinowitzes", "Bernsteins", "Ackermans", etc., that writers have used for stage and story down through the ages.

I understand you have a wife who is an actress. I fail to know what that is to indicate, as I certainly have never met either you or your wife, know virtually nothing of you at all, and to the best of my knowledge, have never met anyone who knows you.

I would suggest, then, that there is a presumption in your concern that is without foundation; moreover, I must comment that had I sought to do malice to someone, I should not have thought to do it by utilizing his name to designate my most principal and sympathetic character! I will assume you have not read the play and have been victimized by personal

apprehensions which have nothing whatsoever to do with me or my work. But then, it is an apprehensive age.

Please accept my good wishes and hope that you will see and enjoy my play.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Hansberry
Lorraine Hansberry

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LH/eb

Appendix 11

William Branch letter to the author (April 26, 2006)

April 26, 2006

Dear Nathaniel,

As I understand it, you'd like me to comment on 1) Black playwrights' relationships to the civil rights movement during the '50' and '60's, and 2) what influence there might have been due to Black playwrights' access to civil rights leaders during this period. (Correct me if I'm wrong.)

1) I can, of course, speak only of the handful of Black playwrights I knew and was associated with during the '50's and '60's on these topics. First, let me establish that we were not alone; we were part of a black artistic and literary grouping which involved itself in the ferment leading up to, and including, what later was dubbed the (modern) civil rights movement. The group included novelists and essayists; actors; singers; stand-up comedians; visual artists (painters, etc.); facilitators (arts administrators, etc.) and general supporters of the arts, as well as playwrights. In some cases, these categories overlapped.

Thus, we black playwrights (in New York City) found ourselves writing what is sometimes referred to as "protest drama,"; i.e., plays that articulated the rising resentment and anger at the treatment of Negro (which was the term of choice in those days) citizens by a hypocritical white America, and in some cases agitated actual rebellion in one form or another. As such, we were in our own way a part of what the new medium of television was gradually (and belatedly) bringing into America's living rooms during the '50's and '60's.

2) I can't speak for all New York Black playwrights of the period, but having some access to leaders and luminaries of the movement was certainly influential to some, including yours truly. During much of the period, I had close ties with the national office of the NAACP, which occasionally commissioned me to do special writing and producing projects. Thus, I had access to Roy Wilkins and Henry Lee Moon of that office, as well as meeting and interviewing (on a weekly broadcast on Queens radio station WWRL, "Your NAACP On The Air") such people as Rosa Parks, Daisy Bates, Julian Bond, Constance Baker Motley, and many others. In addition, for close to three years, I worked with former Baseball Hall-of-Famer Jackie Robinson (an unofficial, but leading spokesman on civil rights issues) as director of his NBC radio show and originator and co-writer of his syndicated newspaper column (in which we often voiced views and concerns important to the NAACP, of which he was a board member).

During this period, I was commissioned by the Delta Sigma Theta sorority (of which Dorothy Height was a top official) to write a play on an earlier civil rights heroine and honorary Delta, Mary Church Terrell of Washington, D. C., to be produced at their 50th Anniversary convention in Chicago in 1960. I did so, but to relate Mary Church Terrell's story to the contemporary scene, I enclosed the play in a prologue and epilogue set in the '60's involving the then-current sit-ins. I'm happy to report that it worked.

Loften Mitchell, of course, had access to the Rev. Joseph DeLaine of South Carolina when working on his play, "A Land Beyond the River." Ossie Davis was a close friend of Malcolm X, and I gather Lorraine

(MORE)

-2-

Hansberry had contact with Malcolm also, though I don't know how close. I wouldn't be surprised if it turns out that Alice Childress also had ties to Malcolm, though I have nothing to go on there. As for myself, though I met Malcolm briefly on one occasion, I can't claim to have known him on a personal level at all. Like many others of the time, however, I watched his rise and activities with great interest.

As for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., both Lorraine Hansberry and I attended a soiree at Harry Belafonte's West End Avenue apartment in the late 1950's when King was the guest of honor. I remember posing a question to King (originally voiced by writer-activist Julian Mayfield, who declined to ask it himself) as to why we should be so anxious to integrate into a burning house. King never answered, though others proceeded to berate the questioner for raising the question! However, not long afterward I heard Hansberry on the radio at some forum or other blatantly raise the same question as if it were her own. And very recently, Belafonte has several times publicly stated that, not long before he died, King told him privately that he was beginning to have second thoughts about "integrating into a burning house."

Though I was briefly in his presence several other times, I never got to know King on a personal basis. I do recall, however, that Henry Lee Moon called me once and asked about my availability to work with a "young preacher from Montgomery, Alabama" on his first book. I must in all candor report that I declined.

Later, when a second such query came in from the NAACP national office concerning Daisy Bates of Little Rock, Arkansas, I did meet with her and reviewed her manuscript. Afterward, I encouraged her to complete her first-hand account of the Central High School/Little Rock Nine debacle by herself and then bring in someone to help her edit. She did, and the resultant book, The Long Shadow of Little Rock, is now a classic. Though I never wrote a play involving Daisy or the Little Rock Nine, I did try over several years, with Daisy's blessing and support, to interest the television networks in doing a dramatization based on Daisy's book. I got nowhere. Instead, one of the networks (not sure, but I think it was NBC) eventually did a TV drama on these events based on a narrative by a white female teacher named Huckabee, which, obviously, presented a starkly different point of view.

I hope this may prove to be of some help as you work on your dissertation.

As ever,



William B. Branch

Appendix 12

NAACP press release: *NAACP Role in the Struggle for Freedom of Residence* (November 24, 1961)

Reproduced From the Collections of the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

HOUSING

NEWS FROM

NAACP

20 WEST 40TH STREET
ROY WILKINS
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

NEW YORK 18, N. Y.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

BRYANT 9-1400
HENRY LEE MOON
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

FOR RELEASE: UPON ISSUANCE OF PRESIDENT'S EXECUTIVE ORDER
ON DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING

NAACP ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE
FOR FREEDOM OF RESIDENCE

Long before President Kennedy issued his order curbing racial segregation or other forms of discrimination in federally-aided housing programs, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People had launched its campaign to establish freedom of residence as a basic American right. Even before the government became directly involved in housing programs the NAACP was in the midst of this struggle.

In the long drive to secure for Negro Americans the right to purchase property and to live wherever they wished and their means permitted, the NAACP has utilized litigation, legislative lobbying, petitions and educational programs.

Half a century ago, two years after the founding of the organization, the NAACP responded to an appeal from Negro citizens in Kansas City, Mo., for legal assistance in a housing case involving the systematic bombing of Negro homes in a fringe area. That was in November, 1911 — the Association's first housing case.

As recently as August 29, 1961, NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins as chairman of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights together with Arnold Aronson, the Conference secretary, submitted an exhaustive memorandum to the White House

calling for such an executive order. On November 8, 1961, Jack Wood, the Association's housing specialist, was a member of a delegation which conferred with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy on this issue.

Milestones in this campaign include the Supreme Court ruling of November, 1917, invalidating local ordinances and state statutes requiring residential segregation; the famous Sweet trial in Detroit in 1926 affirming the right of a Negro to defend his home by force against the assault of a hostile white mob; the Supreme Court ruling of May, 1948, banning court enforcement of racial restrictive covenants; a series of state and federal decisions, 1953-1957, holding segregation in public housing unconstitutional; and enactment of state and local legislation outlawing discrimination in housing, both publicly-aided and privately constructed and owned.

In addition, the Association has repeatedly sought congressional and executive action denying any federal assistance to any discriminatory housing program anywhere in the country.

In the first quarter of the century many cities in southern and border states sought to achieve residential segregation by racial zoning. Among these were St. Louis, Dallas, New Orleans, Louisville, Birmingham, Tulsa, Baltimore and Richmond. Certain sections of the cities were allocated to Negroes and other areas to white persons with occupancy restricted according to race.

This device was barred by the United States Supreme Court in a decision handed down, November 5, 1917, in response to a suit filed by the NAACP challenging a Louisville ordinance. The Court ruled that an ordinance of this type was an abridgement of property rights "in direct violation of the fundamental law enacted in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution."

From 1911 until the present day, there has been no period in which the NAACP has not been engaged in efforts to enable Negro citizens to live in decent homes of their own choosing. Some of these efforts have been spectacular and widely

publicized like the Sweet case for which the Association retained the celebrated Clarence Darrow as defense counsel. Some have established legal precedent and redounded to the benefit of other minorities as in the restrictive covenant cases. Some have consisted of the grubby undramatic work of compiling statistics, publishing reports, buttonholing legislators, and testifying before legislative committees. Some branches have engaged in picketing and other demonstrations for freedom of residence.

The Association has cooperated with other groups, like the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. It has encouraged builders like Morris Milgram in the development of open occupancy housing projects. It has given counsel and legal assistance to individuals and groups seeking to breach the ghetto walls.

All these efforts provided a foundation for the President's executive order.

Following is a chronology of highlights in the long struggle to secure equal housing rights for Negroes:

CHRONOLOGY OF HOUSING DESEGREGATION

1911

November First housing case brought to NAACP with appeal from Negro citizens in Kansas city, Mo., whose homes in previously all-white neighborhoods had been bombed.

1916

February 29 Residential segregation voted in St. Louis, Mo. NAACP engaged in efforts to defeat such ordinances in that city and in Dallas which later adopted similar legislation.

April 11 Moorfield Storey, NAACP president, argued the Louisville, Ky., residential segregation case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

1917

April 27 Louisville residential segregation case reargued before U.S. Supreme Court by Moorfield Storey and associates.

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November 5 Supreme Court ruled the Louisville ordinance an unconstitutional denial of due process. Even after this ruling some cities enacted such legislation.

1 9 2 1

October Tulsa, Oklahoma, passed an ordinance aimed at stopping Negroes from returning to their homes after rioting, devastation and killings.

1 9 2 5

November 27 Mistrial declared in trial of Dr. and Mrs. Ossian H. Sweet and nine other Negroes on charge of murder of a member of a mob of 1,500 white people who gathered threateningly and hurled stones at the house into which Dr. Sweet had moved in a white neighborhood in Detroit. After 46 hours of deliberation the jury was unable to reach a verdict.

1 9 2 6

May 13 In the second Sweet trial, only one of the original 11 defendants was tried. The jury found Henry Sweet, brother of the physician whose home had been stormed, not guilty. Clarence Darrow, the celebrated criminal lawyer, served as chief counsel in both trials.

May 24 In Washington, D.C., Mrs. Irene H. Corrigan, a white woman, and John J. Buckley, a white man, were parties to a restrictive agreement not to sell to Negroes. Mrs. Corrigan subsequently agreed to sell to Mrs. Helen Curtis, a Negro woman, and Buckley filed suit for specific performance of the agreement not to sell to Negroes. The court entered a judgment against Mrs. Corrigan forbidding her to sell to Mrs. Curtis. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the appeal was dismissed for want of jurisdiction. (*Corrigan v. Buckley*)

1 9 3 9

First state law against discrimination in public housing passed by New York State Legislature. Fourteen other states now have similar laws. In each of these states, the NAACP state organization played a vital role in securing enactment of the legislation.

1 9 4 0

November 12 Skirting the constitutional issue of restrictive racial covenants, the U.S. Supreme Court, on a legal technicality, reversed an Illinois State Supreme Court decision which barred Carl Hansberry, a Chicago Negro, from occupying a home which he had purchased in a white neighborhood where 55 per cent of the home owners had entered into a covenant not to sell to Negroes. In a decision read by Justice Harlan Stone, the Court based its ruling on the ground that the Illinois court had erred and thereby operated to deny due process to Hansberry

5

1 9 4 0

November 12 in declaring him to be a member of a class of citizens whose right to
(Cont'd) attack the covenant was precluded by virtue of a decision in a
previous case upholding this covenant. As a result of the U.S. Supreme
Court's decision, an area of 27 city blocks in Chicago with some 2,500
dwelling units was opened up for occupancy by Negroes. The suit was
filed by lawyers retained by the Chicago branch of the NAACP.
(*Hansberry v. Lee*)

1 9 4 8

May 3 The Supreme Court, through Mr. Chief Justice Vinson, held in a 6-0
opinion (three Justices having disqualified themselves), that restrictive
covenants, though valid contracts, cannot be enforced by state courts.
In *Hurd v. Hodges*, this same ruling was made applicable to federal
courts. (*Shelly v. Kramer*)

1 9 4 9

February 1 NAACP submitted to the President of the United States a 21-page
memorandum charging that the Federal Housing Administration, despite
the Supreme Court ruling of May 3, 1948, invalidating judicial enforce-
ment of restrictive covenants, "has continued to lend its full support
to the perpetuation of ghettos."

December 2 As a direct result of NAACP activities, the federal government withdrew
as an active partner in the maintenance of the ghetto system. Announce-
ment of the new policy was made by the Solicitor General. It gave
assurance that neither the FHA, the Veterans Administration, nor the
newly established urban renewal program would insure or enter into any
contracts to give federal subsidy to properties against which re-
strictive covenants were recorded in the deed of mortgage after
Feb. 15, 1950.

1 9 5 1

December 13 Seven officials and employees of Cicero Township, Illinois (Chicago
suburb), indicted by special grand jury for their roles in preventing
Harvey E. Clark, Jr., and family, from occupying an apartment rented in
previously all-white community the previous June. Association provided
full legal and organization support. Clark had been driven away from
his new home in July by Cicero police backed by a mob of 6,000.

1 9 5 3

June 15 In this case (*Barrows v. Jackson*) the Supreme Court held that it was a
violation of the equal protection and due process clauses of the
Fourteenth Amendment for a state court to award damages for violation
of restrictive covenants.

6

1 9 5 3

July 30 Donald Howard and family moved into previously all-white Trumbull Park, a low-rent public housing project owned and operated by the Chicago Housing Authority. White mobs terrorized the community for many months. Ten additional Negro families later moved in.

1 9 5 3 to 19 5 5

Eleven cases in state and federal courts held racial segregation in public housing unconstitutional.

1 9 5 7

December 30 Mayor Wagner of New York signed Brown-Sharkey-Isaacs bill, the first city law banning discrimination in private housing, effective April 1, 1958. Pittsburgh later enacted similar law.

1 9 5 9

April 10 Colorado enacted first state law against discrimination in private housing, effective May 1, 1959. Eight other states have since passed such laws. Again, NAACP state units were instrumental in securing enactment of these statutes.

November 30 Federal Housing Administration issued a directive to all field offices requiring implementation of Administration's policy "to deal with the public without distinction as to race, creed, or color in the rental and sale of properties acquired by FHA."

1 9 6 1

June 1 The Federal Home Loan Bank Board adopted and circulated to all supervisory agents the following resolution:

It is hereby resolved that the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, as a matter of policy, opposes discrimination, by financial institutions over which it has supervisory authority, against borrowers solely because of race, color or creed.

November 8 Representatives of the NAACP and other interested organizations conferred with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy on the Government's role in assuring open occupancy policies in all federally-aided housing programs.

Appendix 13

Letter from Julian Bond to Robert Nemiroff (July 8, 1963)

July 8, 1963

Robert Nemiroff
337 Bleecker Street
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Nemiroff:

We are again extending our thanks to you for your continuous efforts as a leader of the Artists Committee.

You are aware, of course, how much these benefit performances aid us financially. Our gratitude extends further than the monetary gain - it is in great appreciation of the time and energy which you give unselfishly.

We are aware that you perform a vital service apart from financial assistance, that through your efforts the general public in the North is being alerted to the activities of the SNCC workers in the South.

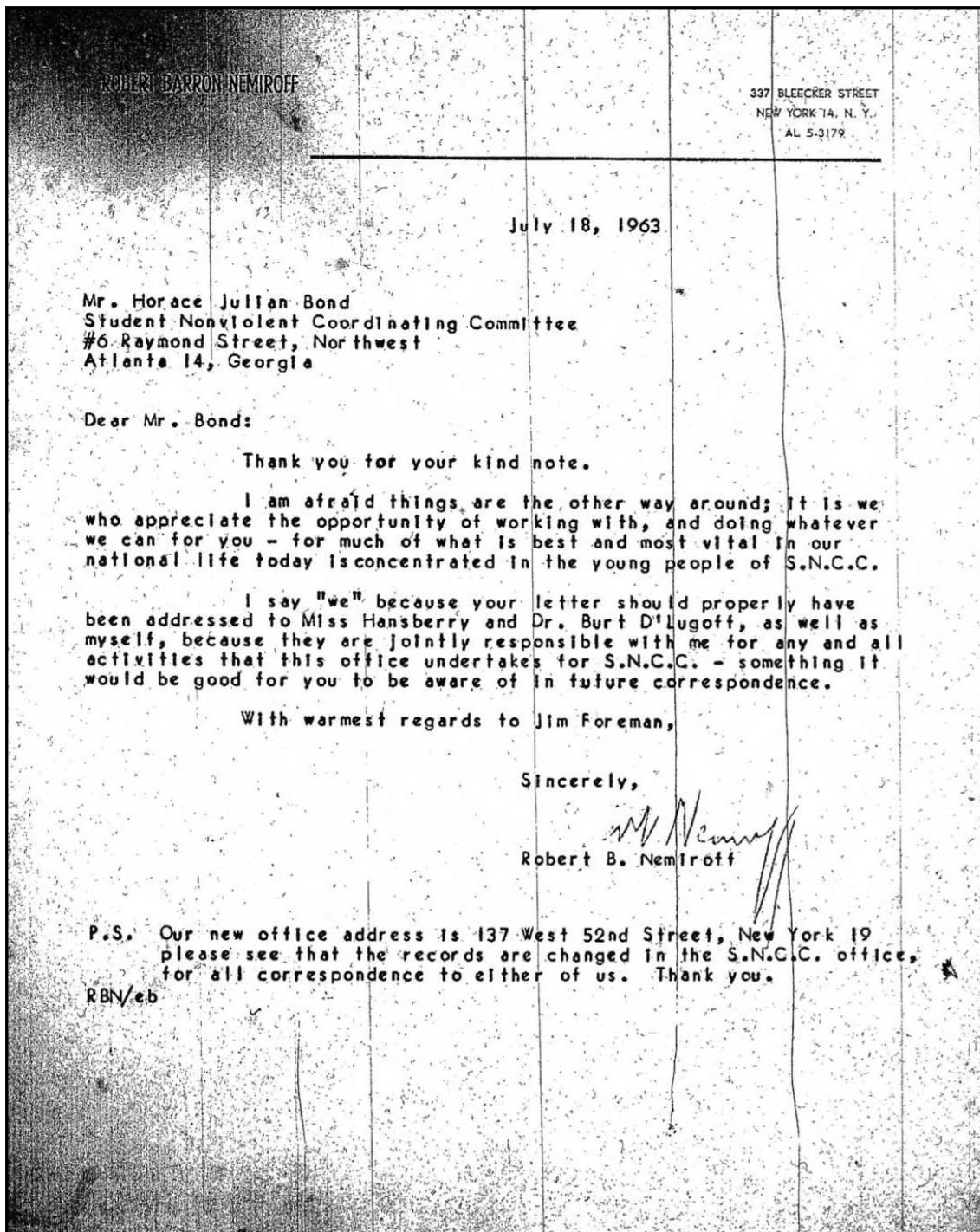
It is difficult for us to express our appreciation.

Sincerely,

Horace Julian Bond
SNCC

Appendix 14

Letter from Robert Nemiroff to Julian Bond (July 18, 1963)



Appendix 15**Letter from Robert Nemiroff to James Foreman (September 20, 1963)**

September 20, 1963

Mr. James Foreman
Student Nonviolent Coordinating
Committee
#6 Raymond Street, Northwest
Atlanta 14, Georgia

Dear Jim:

This should answer all questions.

As to the fulfilling of it, if there is any question in your mind about that, I'd suggest you have someone officially from SNCC follow up.

Expect to hear from you re Marlon Brando and Hollywood Stars night for SNCC as soon as possible.

Best,

Robert Nemiroff
Robert Nemiroff

RN/eb
encl.

Appendix 16

Letter from Julian Bond to Lorraine Hansberry (April 27, 1964)



Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

6 Raymond Street, N.W.
Atlanta 14, Georgia

April 27, 1964

688-0331

Mrs. L. H. Nemeroff
337 Bleeker Street
New York City, New York

*Will attend -
JH*

Dear Mrs. Nemeroff:

The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) - composed of the national civil rights groups working in Mississippi - is sponsoring a hearing on civil rights in Mississippi on June 9, in Washington. We are writing to inquire if you will join a "jury" to hear testimony from Negro Mississippians about violations of civil rights in the state and from others who will offer testimony about the necessity and rightness of Presidential protection during this summer.

As you know, COFO is planning a "Freedom Summer", a massive program that will involve some 1,000 workers entering the state in late June. They will encourage Negroes to register to vote, man Community Centers, teach in "Freedom Schools" and work on a Freedom Registration project designed to demonstrate that thousands of Negroes in that state do not have the right to vote.

We have learned through bitter experience in these past three years that the judicial, legislative and executive bodies of Mississippi form a wall of absolute resistance to granting civil rights to Negroes. It is our conviction that only a massive effort by the country backed by the full power of the President can offer some hope for even minimal change in Mississippi.

National civil rights leaders have been asked to join with COFO workers to seek an audience with President Johnson on June 10. The evidence presented at the June 9 hearing will be made available to him, and we will request that he use the full powers of his office to insure a peaceful summer for Negro and white Mississippians.

The President must be made to understand that this responsibility rests with him, and him alone, and that neither he nor the American people can afford to jeopardize the lives of the people who will be working in Mississippi this summer by failing to take the necessary precautions before the summer begins.

Your presence on the jury would aid our cause, and lend weight to

"One Man, One Vote"

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Mrs. L. H. Nemeroff

Page Two

our insistence that justice and order must prevail in Mississippi, this summer and always.

I have been appointed Coordinator of the June 9 hearing, and hope to hear from you within the week.

Sincerely,

Horace Julian Bond

Horace Julian Bond
SNCC

HJB/jeb

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Appendix 17

Letter from James Farmer to Lorraine Hansberry (April 11, 1962)

April 11, 1962

Mrs. Lorraine Hansberry
112 Waverly Place
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mrs. Hansberry:

Please accept our sincere thanks for your graciousness in meeting with CORE representatives, Jerome Smith and Waldon Rougeau during their recent visit to New York City. Both of these young men enjoyed tremendously the courtesies which you extended to them, and we appreciate your taking time from what we know is a busy schedule to do this.

Sincerely yours,

James Farmer
National Director

JF/cc

Appendix 18

Thurgood Marshall to Lorraine Hansberry (October 7, 1958)

N. A. A. C. P. LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND, INC.

10 Columbus Circle, New York 19, N. Y.

JUNSON 6-8397

✓
October 7, 1958

Miss Lorraine Hansberry
337 Bleecker Street
New York, New York

Dear Miss Hansberry:

I hope you will agree to be guest of honor at a small supper party in New York in November or December, which is being arranged to help the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

We will not ask you to make a speech but hope you will join me and other friends in an informal discussion of some of the problems that concern us. A purpose of the party is to encourage those present to make additional contributions to our work, although they will not be asked directly that evening. We are in a real emergency at this time because of the expenses of more than forty law suits in which we are now involved. One of our toughest fights is against the Pupil Placement laws which reduce compliance with the Supreme Court to token integration of 60 or 70 children in an entire State while the tens of thousands remain in Jim Crow schools.

There will be about fifty guests, especially selected for the very generous contributions they have given and can give. We shall meet at the home of two of these friends, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Buttinger, who have made their new house and private library at 10 East 87th Street available and who are specially anxious to meet you.

This is true of all the other people we will invite. Like the Buttingers, I am told that most of them have seen "A Raisin in the Sun" at least twice and will be very pleased to have a chance to meet you and your husband.

It will help us greatly if you will be our guest of honor. I shall try to telephone you after you have this letter to learn your answer and discuss a date for the meeting. Or, you may want to telephone me.

Like the friends described above, I am looking forward to meeting you.

Sincerely yours,

Thurgood Marshall

Thurgood Marshall
Director and Counsel

TM:fe



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Appendix 19**Stanley M. Isaacs to Lorraine Hansberry (August 13, 1959)**

STANLEY M. ISAACS
MINORITY LEADER
475 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

OFFICE OF THE MINORITY LEADER
THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
CITY HALL
NEW YORK 7, N. Y.

August 13, 1959


Miss Lorraine Hansberry
Ethel Barrymore Theatre
243 West 47th Street
New York 36, N.Y.

Dear Lorraine Hansberry:

Mrs. Isaacs and I saw RAISIN IN THE SUN last evening and found it a most exciting performance. Of course it is not a perfect play - you would be the first to admit it, and you did in that interesting reflection of yours published in "The Village Voice". But I have rarely been more profoundly moved than I was, and more excited at the perfection of the acting by most of those on the stage. And of course the theme appealed to me beyond measure. Nothing could be more timely, and I hope more effective in promoting a sound cause in which you and I both have such deep interest.

My congratulations.

Sincerely yours,


Stanley M. Isaacs

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Appendix 20**Loften Mitchell to Lorraine Hansberry (January 21, 1960)**

200-05 100th Avenue

Hollis, Long Island

January 21, 1960

Dear Lorraine:

In the midst of all that happened last night I did not get a chance to tell you that I found your article in Sunday's Times exciting, well-written, intelligent, and worthwhile.

I want you to know, too, that I am proud of you and your accomplishments. I am particularly proud of the way you continue to lend yourself to important and worthwhile things. I know how much of your time this takes, too. But, I want you to know that it is highly appreciated, too.

So, thanks again. Thanks for everything. Keep well, and keep on driving ahead. With people like doing so, the future looks very bright, indeed.

Best wishes,



Loften Mitchell

Appendix 21**Elmer Rice to Lorraine Hansberry (May 23, 1959)**

ELMER RICE

815 LONG RIDGE ROAD

STAMFORD, CONN.

May 23, 1959

Dear Miss Hansberry:

Recently I saw *A Raisin in the Sun*, and I just want to tell you how much I enjoyed it. It is a very well written and most interesting play, both funny and touching, and full of good observation and meaning. It also has what we used to call "social significance", but you have woven it skillfully into the texture of the play. In short, I think you have done a fine job, and I'm sure you must be greatly pleased with the play's enthusiastic reception. I hope we shall hear more from you soon. The theatre is greatly in need of new writing talent.

Cordially yours,

*Elmer Rice**replied
6/5/59*

Appendix 22**Lorraine Hansberry's reply to Elmer Rice (June 5, 1959)**

June 5, 1959

Dear Mr. Rice,

I am deeply pleased and complimented that you took the time to send your quite kind remarks about our play.

The warm encouragement of established playwrights, like yourself, has been one of the most beautiful aspects of this entire experience.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Hansberry
(Mrs. Lorraine Nemiroff)

337 Bleach St., N.Y.

Appendix 23

Dorothy Miller [SNCC] to Robert Nemiroff (February 12, 1963)

80-AUG-2006 COPY FROM MANUSCRIPT DIV. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS D1

February 12, 1963

Mr. Robert Barron Nemiroff
 837 Bleecker Street
 New York 14, New York

Dear Mr. Nemiroff:

We are getting those thank you letters off today.

Ella asked me to check with you on the following: I have somewhat of a talent for writing heart-rending fund appeals, and I would like to send some of same to the following theatre people; Ella suggested that I check with you first so that there would be no duplication. They are:

Luther Adler
 Stella Adler
 Joseph Buloff
 Betty Field
 John Gassner
 Ben Hecht
 Judy Holliday
 Arthur Kennedy
 Raymond Massey

Arthur Miller
 Paul Muni
 Paul Newman & Joanne Woodward
 Clifford Odets
 Molly Picon
 Elmer Rice
 Irwin Shaw
 John Steinbeck
 Lee Strasberg

Susan Strasberg
 Eli Wallach
 Ethel Waters
 Zero Mostel

We thought it would be a good idea to let you know which names I would write to so that if you made contact with them, you would know beforehand what I had done.

I will wait to hear from you before I start on the letters, so I would appreciate it if you would let me know soon. If there are any names you wish to forget about, please indicate which; the same goes for others you think should be added.

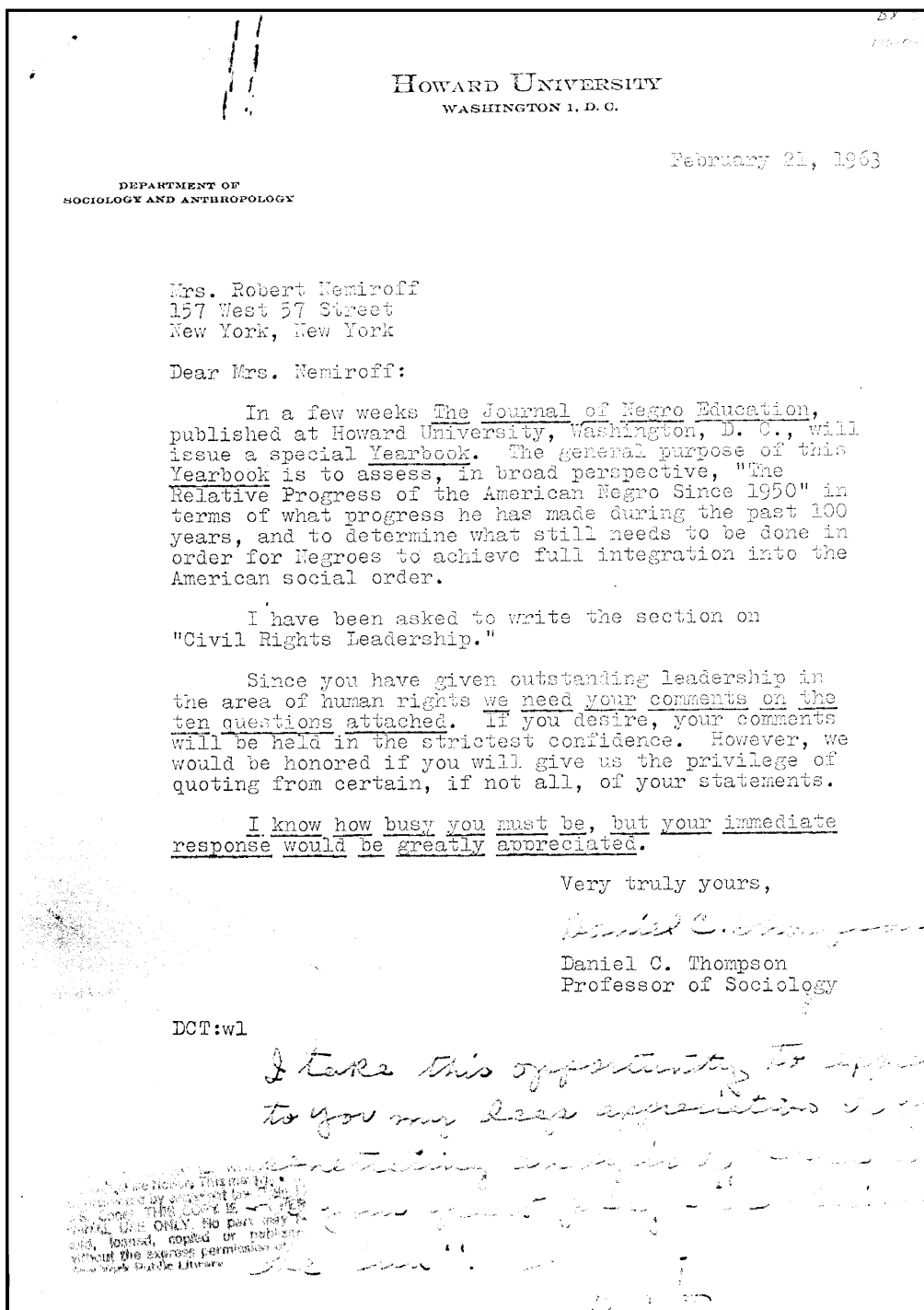
Many thanks from all of us for the wonderful work you did on the Carnegie Hall benefit. We all appreciate it more than we can possibly describe.

Sincerely yours,

Dorothy Miller
 SNCC office staff

Appendix 24

Daniel C. Thompson to Lorraine Hansberry (February 21, 1963)



Civil Rights Leadership

(1863-1963)

1. In what areas of our national life would you say Negroes have made the most significant progress since 1863?
2. In what areas of our national life would you say Negroes have made the least progress since 1863?
3. In what areas of our national life would you say Negroes have made the most significant progress since 1950?
4. In what areas of our national life would you say Negroes have made the least progress since 1950?
5. What organizations would you say have been most effective in the area of civil rights since 1950?
6. In order of importance, what three Americans do you believe have made the most significant contributions to civil rights since 1950? (Please give reasons for your nominations.)
7. What leadership strategies and techniques used by civil rights leaders would you say have been most effective in the progress Negroes have made since 1950?
8. What leadership strategies and techniques used by civil rights leaders would you say have been most ineffective in achieving equality of citizenship for Negroes since 1950?
9. Assuming that civil rights leaders will continue efforts to achieve equal citizenship status for Negroes--in what specific areas of our national life would you suggest they concentrate their activities? (Please give reasons for your conclusion.)
10. In your judgment, are there strategies and techniques civil rights leaders might use that so far they have not used to any significant extent? (Please explain your answer.)

Appendix 25

Lorraine Hansberry's reply to Daniel C. Thompson (March 22, 1963)

Lorraine Hansberry

337 Bleecker Street, New York 14, N. Y., AL 5-3179

RECEIVED
MARCH 22 1963
U.S. DEPT. OF JUSTICE
CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20535

March 22, 1963

Dear Dr. Thompson:

Thank you for your letter and for your gracious remarks about my play.

With regard to the questionnaire, I am going to take the liberty of disregarding its form and answering in essay paragraphs; I think I shall be able to include some of my larger opinions that way.

The truth of the matter is that I don't believe ~~that~~, excepting that brief period of the Reconstruction itself, that the Negro people have been integrated into dominant American society at all. I can think of no field where the fact of our presence is taken as a matter of course rather than an excessively touted or meanly embattled exception. (If one thinks of baseball or the armed services one must still concede that we are not represented in the really high echelons of the military and I have not heard of Negroes involved in ownership or management of the great commercial major league clubs. To my mind this is not integration; it is the admission of some Negroes in highly restricted capacities regardless of the numerical strength of their participation in those restricted areas.)

In any case I am of the opinion that the present condition of U.S. Negroes is what it always was: the universal oppression of an entire people rather than a random exclusion and discrimination against Negro individuals. In the face of it I do not find that our more traditional rights organizations are particularly realistic in either intentions or results.

Thus I think that the most important developments in the struggle for equality are those movements to lately erupt which have done precisely what the hostile social order most enjoins us not to do: attract the attention of the rest of the world to our plight and thereby use international sensitivity on the matter as a weapon in behalf of our otherwise mostly powerless people. This then, to me, is the real value of things like the Montgomery struggle and the subsequent student movements: they make it possible for the Negro question to be

-2-

forced upon the conscience of a nation which is otherwise delighted to have any number of priority questions that it must always deal with first. So then I would say that the "individuals" who have done the most in the field are mainly the unknown ones who have done the walking and singing across the south; who have done the sitting-in and have suffered the shooting and spit of the racist mobs. Those are the main individuals whom I would cite. After them those actual leaders who have ~~person~~ personalized this qualitative development; one thinks first of Mrs. Bates of Little Rock; Bob Williams who told the Negroes of Monroe to fight back, of course; the student leaders of the various non-violent organizations such as young Charles McDew of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. I have, interestingly, not included Dr. King here because I am not informed enough on the ultimate course of the Montgomery movement since he accepted leadership of it; I will say only that it seemed to have a pulse, a passion that has almost imperceptibly gone into quiescence and I should like to know more about the why and how from informed people before I make any judgement of Dr. King.

In the field of literature I think without a doubt the most honored name ~~is~~ is that of James Baldwin who, in his essays, (I think his novels are unfortunate mainly) has taken the politeness out of discussions of the brutalizing experience of the black man in this country and put it down as it is. I think Mr. Baldwin has left the apologists, ~~the~~ black or white, no where to go but toward the truth.

Finally, I must say that I am among those who find the "program" of the black Muslims mainly unfathomable and the fathomable part irrational, but I have not been able to escape the observation that their vocal and colorful protest has made more white folk take seriously the idea that Negroes really are upset about the mess in this country and had better be listened to. I would, therefore, cite them and their movement as a meaningful contribution which does not have to be applauded to be acknowledged.

On the other side, I think it is an insult to our people to ^{see} white folks handing one another awards for "civil rights" - especially any member of the government. It seemed to me that there was only one reasonably sincere champion of Negro equality of genuine stature in national life and that was Mrs. Roosevelt. Of personages such as Senator Humphrey I think nothing at all other than the fact that they are self-interested politicians. Of the NAACP, well, I am not sure that our people will ever have enough money to fight ALL the court cases it would take to begin to re-state what is already on the books. I think it is probably an outmoded organization. Hostile power in this country does not appear to be in the least responsive to legalisms. The celebrated Supreme Court decision of several years ago seems to have virtually invalidated its implications by the sheer fact of the nature of Negro life as a reality today. I mean I cannot see that it changed anything.

-3-

What emerges then is a less "orthodox" list than would have seemed fashionable a few years ago; but like so many of our youth I feel that the old games of giving Ralph Bunche an award (or Lorraine Hansberry for that matter) for doing something that a Negro has not been allowed to do before is today intolerable. Leontyne Price is a very great artist - but the fact of her presence in the Metropolitan alters the conditions of the masses of Negroes not in the least; neither will a Negro stuck here and there in the cabinet eventually.

I suspect that our wisest direction lies in the encouragement of the rudimentary sorts of action which I have already cited, directed toward the truly mass organization of Negroes. I am thinking of organization on a national scale which can tell ~~xxxx~~ twenty ~~xxxxx~~ million people not to buy something, not to vote for ~~some~~ and so or such and such a party; not to go to work on such and such a day - and have as much as thirty or forty percent obey. I believe the roots of such a movement are in the South now; being developed and refined in the beginning efforts of the voter registration drives and boycotts. I think the leadership which is being fashioned in these quite heartless and dangerous struggles (I have met some of these youths, we recently held a sort of artists concert at Carnegie Hall here to help raise money, they have all been jailed or beaten or shot at or shot) will arrive at ideas like these. I don't think there is much of another direction. Julian Mayfield (the writer) has said that whether we like the word or not we are going to have to deal with the fact that the condition of our people dictates what can only be called revolutionary attitudes. It is no longer acceptable to allow racists to define Negro manhood; and it will have to come to pass that they can no longer define his weaponry. I look forward to the day therefore, when a centralized Negro organization will direct me not to pay taxes in protest of this segregated society: it will be a privilege to go to jail.

Schultz,
Lorraine Hansberry

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Appendix 26**William S. Taylor to Lorraine Hansberry (October 30, 1958)**

THE FORD FOUNDATION PROGRAM FOR PLAYWRIGHTS

P. O. BOX 282, RADIO CITY STATION

NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

October 30, 1958

Miss Lorraine Hansberry
 337 Bleecker Street
 New York, N.Y.

Dear Miss Hansberry:

You have been nominated to the Ford Foundation as a candidate for participation in its Program for Playwrights for 1959. The details of the Program are enclosed.

We should be pleased to have you submit a play to be considered under this Program. The play should not be an adaptation of another's work, nor should it have had a professional production.

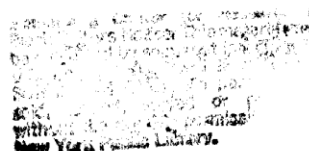
In submitting your play, you will facilitate handling and reading if you will use any standard script folder rather than a spring binder. Please enclose a return self-addressed, stamped manuscript envelope. We would appreciate your submitting your script as soon as possible.

You will be notified of the judges' decision regarding your script after March 1, 1959.

Sincerely yours,

William S. Taylor
 William S. Taylor
 Consultant

WST:sw
 Enc.
 C Files C-623

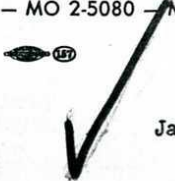


Appendix 27

A. Phillip Randolph: Lorraine Hansberry (January 4, 1960)

Salute to A. Philip Randolph Committee

Headquarters — 165 West 131st Street, New York 27, N. Y.
 Telephones: FO 8-6580 — MO 2-5080 — MU 4-2932



January 4, 1960

Miss Lorraine Hansbury
 112 Waverly Place
 New York City

Dear Miss Hansbury:

It will probably come as a great surprise to the friends and admirers of A. Philip Randolph to learn that this marks his 70th year of a unique lifetime of unparalleled service to his fellow man as a pioneer labor leader, outstanding liberal, a great human being, and a distinguished American citizen. The high esteem in which he is held today by countless numbers of Americans and peoples of other lands, notably Africa, will be given significant public expression at Carnegie Hall on Sunday evening, January 24th, 1960 at eight o'clock.

Speakers include Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Senator Jacob Javits, ex-Governor Averill Harriman, Senator Hubert Humphrey, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Roy Wilkins and others. Leading theatrical stars will participate. Langston Hughes has written a beautiful and very moving poem for the occasion. The Musician's Union is supplying a symphony orchestra. Special messages hailing the event have already been received from Prime Minister Nehru and others are in the mail from other international dignitaries.

We know that Mr. Randolph would be deeply pleased to have your name listed among the Sponsors of this great public tribute. The growing list already includes Mrs. Ralph Bunche, Jackie Robinson, Dore Schary, Mr. & Mrs. Chester Bowles, Langston Hughes, Roger Baldwin, Dr. Buell Gallagher, Reinhold Niebuhr and many other prominent citizens. Enclosed is a card inserted in a self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

We cannot possibly repay A. Philip Randolph for the decades of dedicated service that he has given to his country and its people, but we can through this tribute indicate to him something of the affection and admiration which we feel for him in this 70th year of his radiant life.

Sincerely yours,

Harry Emerson Fosdick
 Harry Emerson Fosdick

Roy Wilkins
 Roy Wilkins

Martin Luther King Jr.
 Martin Luther King, Jr.

Appendix 28

Kenneth Tynan to Lorraine Hansberry (October 1, 1959)

KENNETH TYNAN

October 1, 1959


Dear Mrs. Hansberry -

Now that we have finished shooting the documentary about American non-conformity, I thought I would write to tell you again how grateful I am for your help and co-operation. Leonard Zweig, my associate producer, wants to express his thanks as well.

Yours sincerely
Kenneth Tynan

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56 East 89th St.
Nyc 28

Appendix 29**Brooks Atkinson to Lorraine Hansberry (March 16, 1960)**

The New York Times
Times Square

March 16, 1960

Dear Miss Hansberry:

I was very pleased to have our brief encounter at the theatre last evening. Last summer we had an unpleasant episode, provoked by me. I am glad to have your friendly regards in spite of it.

With all good wishes for your continued success in the theatre.

Brooks Atkinson

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Appendix 30

National Urban League to Lorraine Hansberry (March 24, 1959)



NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE, Inc.

FOR EQUAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

14 EAST FORTY-EIGHTH STREET, NEW YORK 17, N. Y. — PLAZA 1-0300

THEODORE W. KHEEL
PresidentJOSEPH J. MORROW
Senior Vice-PresidentLESTER B. GRANGER
Executive DirectorLOUIS J. GLICKMAN
Vice-PresidentLOUIS E. MARTIN
Vice-PresidentTHOMAS G. YOUNG
Vice-PresidentMOLLIE MOON
SecretaryBURNS W. ROPER
TreasurerMarch
Twenty-fourth
1959

Dear Miss Hansberry:

Thank you so much for accepting our invitation to be one of our honorees at the National Urban League's Administrative and Clerical Council luncheon to be held at the Brass Rail Restaurant at 100 Park Avenue on Saturday, June thirteenth.

We look forward so much to meeting you then.

Sincerely yours,

(Mrs.) Evelyn King Broidy
ACC Luncheon Committee

Miss Lorraine Hansberry
337 Bleecker Street
New York, New York

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Affiliated with National Social Welfare Assembly, National Conference on Social Welfare.



Appendix 31

Rally to support the Southern Freedom Movement (June 16)

"Our sorrowing gaze turns to the other children of God everywhere, suffering because of race and economic conditions... Our word of heartfelt sympathy longs to pour forth into the hearts of each one an expression of human and Christian solidarity".

POPE JOHN XXIII

Rally to support the Southern Freedom Movement

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 3:30 P. M.
TEMPLE ISRAEL, GLENGARY ROAD, CROTON

Chairman: **LORRAINE HANSBERRY**, Author, Raisin in the Sun

Jerome Smith and Isaac Reynolds

Taskforce Organizers of the Congress of Racial Equality,
give you a first-hand report from Mississippi and Alabama.

ADMISSION FREE

Folk Songs by **JUDY COLLINS**

ATTENTION PARENTS! SUPERVISED PLAY FOR SMALL CHILDREN WILL BE PROVIDED

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Judge Seymour Levine
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Mr. and Mrs. Robert Northshield
Mr. Harrison Kinney
Mr. and Mrs. Louis Lubin
Mr. and Mrs. Yale Joel
Mr. Louis Rolnick
Mr. and Mrs. Edward Rutledge
Mr. Seymour Waldman

Appendix 32

Letter from NAACP to Lorraine Hansberry (April 4, 1960)

NAACP

GREENWICH VILLAGE • CHELSEA BRANCH
246 WEST 11TH STREET, NEW YORK 14, NEW YORK
TELEPHONE WATKINS 4-2536

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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JAMES FARMER
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MILDRED BOND
Life Membership



April 4, 1960

Miss Lorraine Hansberry
112 Waverly Place
New York, New York

Dear Miss Hansberry:

The Greenwich Village-Chelsea Branch of the NAACP has planned a CHARTER PRESENTATION BANQUET on May 27, 1960, at the Hotel Fifth Avenue, New York City.

Since we know how keenly you have come to understand the problems that involve us all, we would be sincerely honored to have you share this understanding with us and our guests at this Banquet.

We realize, of course, that your work schedule is heavy. However, we know you will bring an added dimension to this occasion. Please have dinner with us if you are in New York on May 27th.

There will be a reception for the dais guests at 6:30 PM in the Jade Suite.

Because of the planning involved, we would appreciate hearing from you by April 11th.

Sincerely yours,

Jeanne Nyilas

Jeanne Nyilas
President

Robert Graham Brown
Robert Graham Brown
Entertainment Chairman

JN/RGB:ah

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
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Appendix 33

Lorraine Hansberry to Mrs. Osthoff (February 2, 1962)

February 2, 1962

Dear Mrs. Osthoff:

In "A Raisin in the Sun" I tried to use the devices of drama and particular experiences of the contemporary American Negro community to suggest that we cannot, any of us, in or out of that community, very well, ~~expect to~~ succumb to monetary values and know the survival of certain interior aspects of man which, it seems to me, must remain if we are to loom larger than other creatures on the planet. I did not conceive it as an attack on "materialism". That would have, in this instance, have been an ideological absurdity, for at the moment our people fight daily and magnificently for a more comfortable material base to their lives; they desperately need and hourly sacrifice for clean homes, decent food, personal and group dignity and the abolition of terroristic violence as their children's heritage. So, in that sense, I am certainly a materialist in the first order.

However, the distortion of this aspiration surrounds us in the form of almost maniacal lusting for "acquisttions". It seems to have absorbed the national mentality and Negroes, to be sure, have certainly been affected by it. The young man in the play, Walter Lee, is meant to symbolize their number. Consequently, in the beginning, he dreams not so much of being comfortable and imparting the most meaningful gifts to his son (education in depth, humanist values, a worship of dignity) but merely of being what it seems to him the "successful" portion of humankind is - "rich". Toward this end he is willing to make an old trade; urgently willing. On the fact that some aspect of his society has brought him to this point, the core of the drama hangs.

I do not know if you know that the play has been widely criticised because at the end the author chose to show that he really did have within ~~him~~ himself, out of the historical heritage of a great and courageous people, the stuff of which heroes are rather quietly and dally made; a reservoir of not entirely "un-suspected" strength (being his father and his mother's son, after all) which allowed him to rise above the, to me, obscene temptation. Despite that, more than one commentator has remarked that it would have been "truer" to them if he had not found this strength. This, they have said and written, made an otherwise strong play "melodrama". Presumably these are people who do not read the newspapers wherein the counterpart activities of the real-life Walter Lees are reported on daily. Thus, I must admit that it has been the one area of criticism which I have been unable to accept with anything remotely akin to modesty - as it has nothing to do with a criticism of craft but a criticism of philosophy - and philosophically I insist that people are generally better than their circumstances and thought it proper and a necessary to celebrate that belief in the play.

-2-

By that last ambitious sentence I meant to say that I think that the glorious thing about the human race is that it does change the world - constantly. The world or "life" may seem to more often overwhelm the human being, but it is the human beings' capacity for struggling against being overwhelmed which is remarkable and exhilarating. In my opinion all fine drama should rest on some aspect of that recognition.

I should be very unhappy though if that were taken to mean that I have some peculiar notion of a rosy world. On the contrary there are days when I should, like most persons of conscience, utterly like to close out this terrifying world. And yet I see so much to affirm. Some of us who think of ourselves as "artists" have, in fact, grown fond of observing, perhaps arrogantly so, that it is actually easier, in art, to try to approximate the dead, dying or decadent. And that one can lose one's very mind trying to first ~~and~~ discern and then re-create the healthy, the insurgent, the fine. Naturally, great art, has always circumscribed both. But "great" is a luxurious adjective and has little to do with the present output of some of my fellow writers and myself who have to content ourselves with trying to create even a measure of truth - let alone "great truths". However, as I started to say above, we have begun to suspect that the ever recurrent vogues of "despair" in literature and art have their origins in the profound difficulty in creating literature and art of "affirmation". We think, perhaps, and not without some rather snide amusement, that some of the "abstractionists" and "non-objectivists" about have merely decided that they cannot compete with the Renaissance and have therefore flown to the dots, dashes, spilled paint and twisted metal of contemporary painting (and the equivalent in the drama and the novel). Clearly man has grown very, very tiny in the modern drama (some, not all) and virtually disappeared from the canvas. We think it is the cheap way out and will not prevail; man after all was not "finer" when Leonardo or Michelangelo perceived his magnificence or Shakespeare or Shelley discerned the largeness of his spirit!

To try and sum up then: I personally believe that the possibilities of man are infinite. So, indeed, is his cruelty and backwardness and it is a long march ahead. But all these things are dynamic and not static. The little family in "Raisin" tried to effect this and changed their world a little bit. Few of us, I think, can do more; none of us have the right to do less.

[I do not know if this is the sort of reply that was expected or wanted and is probably excessively conversational -but I have written sincerely. "Toassaint", I'm afraid, is in very, very unfinished draft. It will be a good while before it appears. There is only the one stanza to Mr. Hughes poem. I am truly grateful for your interested and interesting letter and hope this has provided some communication of my ideas and feelings about the play which will be useful in your discussions. I hope it will be a fine and rewarding conference.

Sincerely,

Caroline Fanning

Appendix 34

Purlie Victorious Press Release (November 13, 1961)

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November 13, 1961

FOR IMMEDIATE PRESS RELEASE

Ossie Davis, author and star of that splendid Broadway hit play, "Purlie Victorious", attributes the sustained success of the play to the efforts of two Negro writers, Sylvester Leaks and John Henrik Clarke who were engaged by the producers of the play to promote theatre parties among groups, churches, and organizations in the Negro Community.

In four weeks Mr. Leaks and Mr. Clarke have sold over three thousand thickets to various groups from Harlem to New Jersey. Because of their efforts, more Negroes are seeing "Purlie Victorious" than any other Negro play to ever hit Broadway.

When questioned about the nature of their success, Mr. Leaks, whose novel "TROUBLE, BLUES, A' TROUBLE" will be published by Knopf in 1962, attributed it to the following: "First, Mr. Clarke and I believe passionately in PURLIE VICTORIOUS. This makes it psychological easier for us to convince a group or church to sponsor a theatre party, fund raising or fun having. Once we convince them that it is not a play that will embarrass them, the rest is relatively easy. The services that we offer groups free of charge, professional theatre party arrangers charge ten per cent. We supply all of our services and some advertising materials, such as blurbs and writing of sales letter for their mailing list free of charge. All a group has to do is tell us they wish to sponsor a theatre party and the number of tickets desired - we do the rest, making seat reservations

-2-

acquiring the tickets, clearing the date etc."

If your church, social group, or organization wish to spenser a theatre party for PURLIE VICTORIOUS call Mr. Sylvester Leaks or Mr. John Henrik Clarke at: RI 9 - 5565; FO 8 - 2771 or write to LEAKS & CLARKE ASSOCIATES, 410 W. 110th Stree, New York 25, N. Y.

Appendix 35

John Mason Brown to Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board (February 23, 1962)

JOHN MASON BROWN

17 EAST 89th STREET
NEW YORK 28, N. Y.

February 23, 1962

Advisory Board on Pulitzer Prizes
Columbia University
New York 27, N. Y.

Dear Sirs:

By all odds, the best play of the year, the play with the greatest literary merit and intellectual depth, is A Man for All Seasons. But it, of course, is not eligible because its author, Robert Bolt, is an Englishman. Our cupboard, however, is by no means bare. We have in How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying a musical whose excellences are so outstanding that John Gassner and I are proud to recommend it.

The Pulitzer Board has long since, and wisely, recognized in Of Thee I Sing and South Pacific that our musicals can be among the most notable productions of the American theatre. Mr. Gassner and I have always shared this feeling, even though we did not feel that Fiorello!, highly enjoyable as it was, was truly top-flight. We both think that How to Succeed is. And no two people could be less lonely than we are in this opinion. We realize that some may argue that the Pulitzer Prize should not be given with too great frequency to musical comedies. But we hope you will agree with us that How to Succeed should not be penalized because of the recent selection of Fiorello!

Of this year's offerings How to Succeed seems to Mr. Gassner and me to come closer than any other to doing precisely what it has set out to do. It is one of America's triumphant musicals, a jubilant, sardonic, and hilarious travesty of the ways of Big Business and the means to get ahead in it. Fashioned by the same people who were responsible for Guys and Dolls -- Abe Burrows, Jack Weinstock, Willie Gilbert, and Frank Loesser -- How to Succeed is an even better show. Perhaps Howard Taubman came closest to catching the quality of its delights when he wrote, "Imagine a collaboration between Horatio Alger and Machiavelli and you have Finch, the intrepid hero of this sortie into the canyons of commerce." Finch is the ruthless, conscienceless, and charming young rascal of a hero who, as acted by Robert Morse and as written, succeeds in every way. If there is much joy to be had from the

-2-

JOHN MASON BROWN

17 EAST 89th STREET

NEW YORK 28, N. Y.

antics of the young in How to Succeed, we who are older can derive much comfort from Rudy Vallee's performance of the great tycoon, because Mr. Vallee is far more agile now than he ever was in his youth. The performances, however, are not our concern. The over-all quality of the show is, and I for one do not see how in style, spirit, and accuracy How to Succeed could succeed more in achieving its aims.

I have an alternate recommendation which I advance with warmth but not quite the same wholehearted enthusiasm. This is Ossie Davis's Purlie Victorious, which is a sunny and richly funny satire of all the Southern stereotypes -- the mustached Colonel, the subservient Uncle Tom, the colored Mammy, etc. The play has a fine folk quality and at times an exuberance of spirit which makes you think of a Negro Playboy of the Western World. It is no angry propaganda play. Chuckles are its expressions of protest, laughs its weapons of correction. It abounds in such lines as "Being colored can be a lot of fun when there ain't nobody lookin'." Mr. Davis, a fine actor, is also a capable playwright. If you should decide against How to Succeed (as I hope you won't), I would be happy for many reasons to have you choose Purlie Victorious.

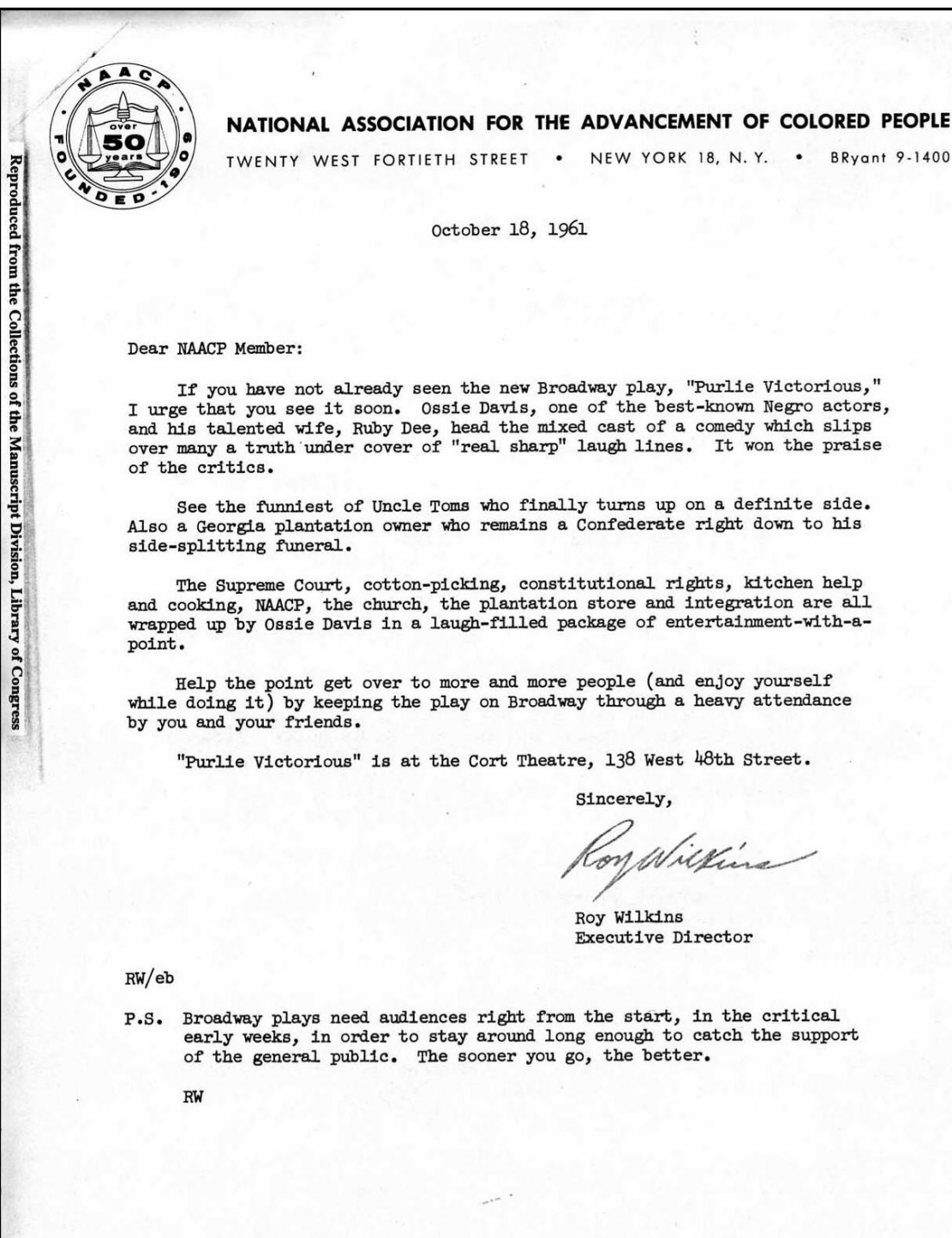
Mr. Gassner tells me that his second choice is Gideon. I, too, admire Paddy Chayefsky and esteem him the more for having undertaken such an ambitious Biblical drama as Gideon. But, in all honesty, I do not think it is more than seventy-five percent successful. To me the final, the needed, the big thing is missing.

Sincerely yours,



Appendix 36

Roy Wilkins to Chapters of NAACP: *Purlie Victorious* (October 18, 1961)



Appendix 37

Progress Report, American Playwrights Theatre (November. 18, 1966)



AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHTS THEATRE

205 Derby Hall • 154 North Oval Drive • The Ohio State University • Columbus, Ohio • 43210 • Area Code 614 • Phone 293-4205

November 18, 1966

TO: APT Members

FROM: David H. Ayers

SUBJECT: Progress Report

CURRENT MEMBERSHIPS EXTENDED

Please note that 1966 APT memberships have been automatically extended until January 1, 1968. It is not necessary for 1966 members to pay the 1967 membership fee, or to return the 1967 subscription forms. The forms were included in our last memo along with the suggestion that they be forwarded to non-member theatres. Several current members have sent checks unnecessarily.

NEW MEMBERS

We are grateful for your assistance in our membership drive and pleased to report that twenty new members have already joined the 1967 program. By January 1, we expect to have a membership of well over 200 theatres with representation in nearly every state.

A 1967 membership list will be prepared and distributed following the January 1 subscription deadline. Members are asked to advise us of any corrections which should be made in our present listings.

REACTIVATION OF "THE DAYS BETWEEN"

At the request of the APT administration, Robert Anderson has agreed to put THE DAYS BETWEEN back into the APT program for another year. Production rights for this play have been extended until January 1, 1968. Although THE DAYS BETWEEN was originally available for exclusive production by 1965 members, 1966 and 1967 APT members will also be eligible to produce it during the extended rights period. The latest revision of the script is being mailed to new members, and copies are available upon request to all member theatres. Enclosed are reviews from three productions last summer which were not previously circulated.

AND PEOPLE ALL AROUND

Also enclosed are reviews from three recent productions of AND PEOPLE ALL AROUND, and a newspaper account of a Ku Klux Klan demonstration at Towson State College. There were nine APT productions of this work during October and November. Several of these theatres have reported full houses, extended runs, and standing ovations.

At Penn State University, a student cast member composed a folk song entitled "People All Around" which was incorporated into the production and played on local radio. The song will be made available for future APT productions upon request. Inquiries should be addressed to J. Peter Shapiro, Manager, University Theatre, Pennsylvania State University, 103 Arts Building, University Park, Pennsylvania.

APT Members

Page 2

George Sklar attended performances at Northridge Theatre Guild, San Francisco State, Montana State, and is now at Green Bay, Wisconsin, witnessing the first production with an all-white cast. "For a secluded novelist," he wrote recently, "I'm the traveling playwright! I must say I'm enjoying it all . . . Whatever the future of this play, it's doing a job on audiences who see it -- and I keep thanking my stars there's an APT to get it to these kids in the universities. They'll be the ones who'll bring sanity to the question."

The next production of AND PEOPLE ALL AROUND will be staged in Washington, D. C. by American University December 8-10, and 14-17. In January the play will be presented by an all-white cast at Denison University, Granville, Ohio.

The following excerpts should also be of interest:

Towson State College -- letter from Professor Gillespie, Director of Drama:

"On opening night, October 20, approximately twenty-five members of the Ku Klux Klan picketed on the road before the college. A crowd of students assembled on the college green and exchanged jeers with the picketers. When the play began the crowd dispersed, and about eight Klan members went in to see the play. They coughed loudly through the performance and made remarks among themselves. There was an outburst of applause during the scene where the civil rights workers were arrested. The Klan members left noisily shortly before the close of the first act. The publicity from this incident resulted in capacity houses all three nights of the play's run."

From the Towson State College Tower Light:

"One thing the KKK did not want to do was make And People All Around the most meaningful and discussed play that Towson State has seen in years . . . Nothing in the world could have emphasized and brought home to the audience the point of the play with more shocking clarity than having the Klan present in all their segregated splendor . . . They proved that insane bigotry does exist and made each of us feel foolish in our heretofore ignorance of it."

Northridge Theatre

(From the Van Nuys News) "A play of crushing impact. Sklar pulls few punches in this powerful indictment of intolerance. It is graphically written and devastatingly real. . ."

Television Review for NEC News:

"A stunning drama of turmoil in a Southern town caused by the killing of three civil rights workers. The Northridge Theatre Guild has met head-on the challenge of a strong and serious play by an important American playwright. George Sklar's And People All Around is a stirring hymn against hatred written with high moral fervor . . . The audience may very well have been sitting in on the preview of a Broadway hit . . . an important new American play."

Ohio State University

WOSU Radio Review by Gene Gerrard:

"Whatever else George Sklar's lacerating indictment AND PEOPLE ALL AROUND may or may not be, it remains a hard-hitting, brutal, deeply disturbing, thoroughly

APT Members

Page 3

frightening comment on the social and moral dilemma in which we find ourselves today...American Playwrights Theatre, The Ohio State University, and particularly the theatre department are to be commended for attempting something new, daring and provocative on a subject that should be foremost in our minds. Where else could such a play find a suitable platform for expression than at a university or community theatre whose patrons and participants we assume still believe that the theatre may yet serve a function other than that of mere escape."

Appendix 38**Press Release, "The Civil Rights Issue: Does it belong in the Theatre and Does it belong in Minnesota?"
(January 31, 1967)**

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
NEWS SERVICE-220 MORRILL HALL
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55455
TELEPHONE: 373-42137
JANUARY 31, 1967

CIVIL RIGHTS IN THE THEATRE
TO BE DISCUSSED AT 'U'

For further information, contact:
DORIS FENICK

(FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

Two groups of University of Minnesota students---one representing civil rights interests and the other from the cast of the current play at University Theatre---will conduct a forum on "The Civil Rights Issue: Does It Belong in the Theater and Does It Belong in Minnesota?"

The discussion, open free to the public, will be held at 12:15 p.m. Tuesday (Feb. 7) in Coffman Memorial Union (CMU) main ballroom, according to Kathy Keleher, student program director of the fine arts area of the Union Board of Governors.

"With the strongly civil rights-motivated play, 'And People All Around,' now playing in Scott hall," Miss Keleher explained, "the opportunity for this discussion seemed too good to miss."

From the cast of "And People All Around" and expressing the theater's point of view will be the forum moderator, Lonnie Morgan, University Theatre graduate student and former member of the University football team; Katheryn Coram, James Alexander and Patricia Brock.

Presenting the point of view of the civil rights workers will be Scotty Stone, Minnesota Student Association senator; Sandy Wilkinson, Ida Elam and Napoleon Crutchfield.

Appendix 39

George Sklar to David Ayres (executive director of APT), November 28, 1966

5307 Fille Ave
Los Angeles, Calif 90036
Nov. 28, '66

COPY

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Dear Dave:

I am enclosing a carbon of the piece I sent to Kenneth Baker for the Washington Post. Whether they'll use it or not remains to be seen.

Strickland called me. He seems to be quite excited about the way the production there is shaping up. He's sent out invitations to a flock of VIPs, but apparently the politicians seem to be very wary about attending an opening on this subject. I'd be considered an endorsement. Of course it's early yet, so it's really hard to tell.

I hope your Roger Stevens contact will be able to get a few people there — people who are interested in promoting the arts. Sen. Javits' wife is a theatre buff for instance and it would be fine if we could get Bobby & Ted Kennedy there. ~~One~~ ^{One} Certainly should be able to get Thurgood Marshall, the solicitor-general. And Leland Buckle Senator Douglas has nothing

to lose. Or Congressman Wetther of Georgia,
 who refused to endorse Maddox. Congressmen
 like Ryan & Celler of N. Y., who have been outspoken
 on civil rights. And others like Roybal, Hawkins
 Bingham, etc. Perhaps Senators Rockefeller,
 Margaret Chase Smith, Saltwater. Perhaps
 Supreme Court Justices Douglas, Fortas, Brennan
 & Warren. Columnists like Drew Pearson
 might go. ^{also} Tom Wicker ^{of Boston} of the N. Y. Times. Lippman.
 Roland Evans. And commentators like Brinkley
 & Howard K. Smith and Edward R. Roybal. And
 civil rights people like Roy Wilkins, Whitney
 Young & Martin Luther King. ^{than} ^{might} ^{get} ^{more} ^{attention} ^{letters}
 I hope the Hell Tarbman will come.
 I think it's his kind of play. And since he
 is covering the arts nationally, it would
 be a good springboard for a piece on A.P.T. ... Was
 he responsive to Bob Anderson? Perhaps Audrey
 Wood, who knows him, might help.
 Dave, I wish you'd send me a
 list of the groups (including towns in which they're
 situated) who have rejected the play. I'd

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lets to try places like Seattle, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Ithaca and others, but have refrained ~~from~~ where there's an APT member group.

Much luck with the membership drive. Do persuade Henry B. Williams of AETA & give you a chance to talk to the members about APT at the convention.

If only Time would come through! But there's no counting on that. Perhaps you might drop in on the Chicago man who's handling the story when you're there - make a personal pitch.

Best,

George Sklar

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Appendix 40

George Sklar, Letter to the Editor [unpublished], NY Times (August 7, 1966)

Handwritten: - c/o Harbst - East Mountain Rd. South - Cold Spring, N.Y.

c/o Harbst
East Mountain Rd. South
Cold Spring, N.Y.
August 7, 1966

To the Editor
Forum Section
New York Times
NYC

I shall not quarrel with Mr. Kauffmann's opinion of my play, And People All Around. I do quarrel with his thesis that the realistic social play cannot in this period affect or move an audience. "Does anyone seriously believe," he asks, "that the many German productions of the Diary of Anne Frank converted German anti-Semites?"

Of course not. Any more than my play, which is concerned with the hot summer of '64 in Mississippi, will convert racial bigots. The theatre is not an evangelist's tent; nor does the social playwright seek conversions. He does seek to shake complacency, to rouse the mind to a heightened awareness of social wrong, to reach the conscience. He is concerned not with bigots and extremists but with the men of good will who read the headlines, are for the moment disturbed---as they are by the next horror story and the next---and yield to apathy and inertia.

"Few people have ever gone to the theatre to learn facts," says Mr. Kauffmann. True. Nor does the social playwright try to compete with the news media in informing them of facts. He may attempt to dramatize and illumine; he certainly strives to move the viewer. Would Mr. Kauffmann deny that the hundreds of thousands of untainted young Germans and, yes, of those older Germans who didn't like Nazism but let it take over, were not affected by the production of Anne Frank? Why the pell of silence after the final curtain? Was it that they disapproved -- or was it embarrassment, shame, guilt?

Mr. Kauffmann seems to think that the audiences for And People All Around, especially university audiences, are by the very fact of their presence already convinced. I don't pretend to have Mr. Kauffmann's occult powers of audience perception, but I did see four performances of the Turin production; I watched the audiences; I saw individuals stalk out in indignation; I saw many moved to tears.

Twenty-five girls and boys from the "Upward Bound" project, an integrated program for underprivileged 17 and 18 year-olds preparing to enter college, came to each of the first two performances. The director of the project reports that they came back each night in such a ferment that they stayed up till three in the morning, arguing and discussing it. Two cynical young men in the program who have been maintaining that the whole issue of civil rights has been blown up and that things aren't nearly as bad as the papers say, came out of a performance silent and speechless. They are no longer claiming those things don't happen.

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(2)

One of the faculty members, a young lady of twenty-five, was so shaken that she ran straight from the theatre to her room and sobbed for half an hour. Three days later she told me that she was reading civil rights literature and was determined to do something active about it.

A director from a nearby university theatre said he'd never spent a more terrifying evening in a theatre. He couldn't sleep, realized finally that after serving in the last war, he'd come to accept the idea that the killing of man by man is an inevitable and immutable fact of life. Seeing the brutality and killing in the play and hearing it discussed in a public situation struck at his conscience and reopened the question.

There were many others who came out stunned and "shock-up" --- among them six nuns who thanked me for writing the play.

Perhaps these aren't symptomatic. Perhaps the audiences at the Texas Christian University production before a six-state religious conference in Austin, Texas the end of this month will be different. They may be different in the many productions by ~~the~~ American Playwright Theatre groups throughout the country in the coming year. It will be interesting to see.

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Appendix 41

George Sklar to David Ayres (February 28, 1967)

530 1/2 Fuller Ave.
Los Angeles, Calif. 90036
Feb. 28 '67

COPY **RECEIVED**
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Dear Dave:

The script arrived today.

I returned yesterday from a most exciting week-end at Menlo Park. The community is upper middle class and quite conservative. There were some on the Menlo Players Guild Board who felt the play was much too controversial and might alienate many of the subscribers. So there was great tension and apprehension as opening night approached.

What happened is accurately described in the headline above the review. The audience was literally stunned. It sat in utter silence, completely absorbed and engaged. At the end of the first act, there was a long hush. No one got up. No one applauded. After a moment someone rose. Then others got up and ^{walked} all ~~walking~~ up the aisles in silence.

After the play was over, there was a similar hush — a tentative moment. Then someone started the applause and it built and built. I was called to the stage and took a bow with the cast — and a very good and dedicated cast it was.

People remained in the theatre for a half hour afterwards. These omnipresent groups ~~seem to~~ ^{seem to} be a part of the growth of such

performance I've seen. There is an excitement and fervor in their discussions which shows how deeply they've been moved.

As always, many people came up to me to thank me for writing such a play. One person, a member for the 26 years of the Guild's existence, said it was the most exciting thing the Guild had ever done. True, one couple stalked out. And some will be offended. But people who never came before are seeing this play. Indeed they had to put extra seats in the aisles the second night.

What's become apparent to me after seeing six productions is that the impact is so intense that people go home talking about the play & keep talking to their friends. So that the word of mouth is immediate. And it's so persuasive that many who are put off by the subject come out of curiosity. It enters the life of the community—as the review suggests. And, of course, I'm delighted.

Here are good quotes from this review and from the Minneapolis Tribune to add to the round-up of quotes about the play.

Did you decide on the Wednesday play? I do hope you'll have a chance to announce it soon — and that the APT will get the attention it merits.

Best,
George

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Appendix 42

George Sklar to David Ayres (November 21, 1966)

530 N. Fuller Ave.
LA Calif. 90036
Nov. 21, 66

COPY

This copy may not be used for any purpose other than private use, scholarship, or research. The Ohio State University Libraries.

Dear Dave,

I've just returned from a fantastic week-end at Univ. of Wisconsin at Green Bay. The town seems to revolve completely around the Green Bay Packers football team; its economy is dependent on it; and it seems to be its only source of diversion and glory.

And People All Around came in as an unlikely intrusion. My presence triggered a couple of newspaper stories and I was even interviewed on the local TV news. So there was a sold-out house on opening night.

What with the shock technique of the play, the stylized use of choros, ~~and~~ the unexpected sight of characters in black & white masks (actually black & white make-up in the shape of domino masks), ~~the~~ and the eruption of the opening of a riot in the auditorium (with figures running & falling into the aisles and a police dog bounding through), the audience didn't know what hit it. It sat tense, ~~and~~ ^{and} silent ~~and stunned~~ through the first act, so stunned that it didn't know whether to applaud or not at its conclusion. It filed out in absolute silence for the intermission. At the end of the play there was another moment of uncertainty.

Then someone started the applause and it built and sustained for eight curtain calls and was still at its peak when the house lights came on. Finally it dribbled off only to start again - with the lights on! It became an ovation with shouts of "Author!" and I had to take a bow. Then it was announced that I would answer questions for any who wanted to stay. God damned if the whole audience didn't remain. The questions reflected the plays' impact on the conscience of many individuals. The question of silence in the face of such monstrous injustices was discussed & compared with the silence of the Germans during Hitler's regime. Ethics, morality and the danger of taking a principled stand were debated. Someone wanted to know how I could have the Redeemers come from the murder of the three boys to a whorehouse for "poontang." "If they hated niggers - I mean negroes - so, how could they want to sleep with them?" A priest and faculty member from nearby St. Norbert College talked quite frankly about the sexual challenge of the negro male. Another priest brought up the injustice to the Indian in Wisconsin (there are no negroes in Green Bay except those on the Packers team and they are only there during the football season). The question of the riots ~~and the violence~~ came up. The discussions went into the economics of the negro's position in America. It was a wide-ranging, concerned and serious talk - and the audience stayed till after midnight.

Here, as in other places, I was struck by the spirited involvement of the crowd. French hadn't

intended to do the play until the spring, but a couple of actors got hold of a script and started to agitate for its immediate production. Other actors were just as zealous — and they succeeded in getting Frisch to change his plans. ... I've never seen a more excited group. They were simply jumping out of their skins at the ^{audience} response. Three faculty members were in the cast and they were just as excited.

A group of students from St. Roberts had seen a run-through I had run over for a question & answer session.

An anthropology prof prepared some "Notes For ^{anthropological} study" based on the play. His classes were asked to see the play and to answer the questions raised in the study. I'm enclosing a copy of it because I think this whole involvement of the college community in the play and its subject matter **COPY** is extraordinary.

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I'm also enclosing the local review.

I've asked Jack Frisch to send you photos of the actors in the black & white make-up masks, since they might be useful for other all white productions. The makeup with mask contours is much better than an actual mask because there's no problem of visibility, and one gets the full facial expression.

I just received your Nov 18th bulletin.

which I think is fine.

Oh, I'm also sending along a Variety piece. Not too accurate but it is a plug for APT. They couldn't review the play because Equity & Daily Variety have an agreement about not reviewing plays with non-Equity casts. But the writer was very excited about the play & found this way to get it into Variety.

Dave, I note that you're sending copies of Days Between to the new members. Are you also sending them copies of And People? **COPY**

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I'm keeping my fingers crossed in the hope that Trine will come through. God, do we need that break!

How have the audiences responded to the Ohio State production? I'm curious to know whether it's generated the same kind of excitement as on smaller campuses?

With the kind of audience reactions the plays been getting, I'll be terribly disappointed if we don't succeed in lining up at least a dozen more productions.

Incidentally, I've heard nothing further from ~~Trinity~~ Trinity College or Illinois

Wesleyan, both of whom indicated a definite desire to do the play I wrote you about it. I'm wondering whether the complicated business about paying a \$20. fine didn't throw them. I hope not. Perhaps they're waiting for someone to read the play for administrative approval. . . .

Best,
 George

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